

From “Gentrification” to Community Control: An exploration into urban restructuring in New York City

by
Aida Mas

supervised by
Dr. Luisa Sotomayor

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Land Acknowledgement

For over 15,000 years, Turtle Island has been stewarded collectively by Indigenous communities. In fact, it was not so long ago that colonization imposed the concept of private ownership of land on what settlers perceived as *Terra nullius*, or “nobody’s land.” This idea – that collectively stewarded land belonged to nobody – ultimately allowed colonial powers to usurp land from Indigenous communities through the imposition of private property. This legacy of extractive dispossession continues to shape our society and relationship to land.

From where I sit today on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, to the occupied Lenape land where most of this research took place, Indigenous communities have been systematically displaced and extirpated from their land. The land which York University occupies is no exception, having been home to the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Huron-Wendat, the Métis, and the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. These Indigenous Nations have been stewarding land through agreements such as the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, which aims to share and preserve the natural life and harmony of the Great Lakes region.

My awareness of the importance of stewardship began far from my own ancestral territories of the Iberian Peninsula and the Middle East. In fact, I became aware of the notion of collective ownership in Coast Salish territories, particularly on the unceded land of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Səlíl̓wətaʔ (Tseil-Watuth), Stó:lō, and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations. Though this research does not focus specifically on Indigenous stewardship of land, I would like to acknowledge the role of Indigenous communities as the traditional caretakers of the many places I have come to call home during this research process. I would also like to emphasize the invaluable role that Indigenous communities continue to play as stewards of this land.

Given the pervasive nature of our colonial relationship to land, I also believe that it is necessary to acknowledge how the primacy of private property has been used to dispossess and disenfranchise communities of colour. Across the United States, racial exclusion from the “American Dream” of private homeownership has resulted in redlining, predatory lending and evictions, stripping communities of colour from their collective wealth. Though these trends have been less common in Canada, there is still much evidence demonstrating the racial inequity that has resulted from our colonial obsession with individualized land ownership. For example,

Vancouver's Hogan's Alley, a formerly working-class immigrant neighbourhood with the largest concentration of Black residents in the city, became the target of urban renewal to pave the way for car culture and the suburban dream. It is in fact not far from Hogan's Alley that I write this land acknowledgement.

As a result, I believe that it is essential to emphasize the ubiquity of colonial and racialized dispossession that has come to characterize the cities that I have occupied throughout this research and writing process. As an educated, white-passing settler, I personally have benefited from this inequitable status quo, and strive to work towards reconciliation and social justice in my work as a researcher, urban planner and community organizer.

Abstract

Discriminatory land use policies and the whims of global capital have stripped many low-income communities and people of colour from their ability to secure adequate housing. This has resulted in a deeply inequitable status quo that continues to shape cities through the displacement of these communities. In response, some groups have organized to gain control of land and capital in an attempt to reshape urban power dynamics to favour the needs of residents rather than the accumulation of capital.

This portfolio explores the process of neighbourhood change and displacement, as well as the strategies and models that communities adopt to overcome the inequitable distribution of land and resources. In order to do so, the portfolio adopts a multi-scalar approach to analyzing urban change, community organizing and local control of land. The first component provides context for this research through a self-reflexive autoethnography exploring the connection between our individual choices and the broader socio-economic phenomenon of urban restructuring. The second component makes a case for the need for community control to mitigate the racially and socially unjust distribution of land, while proposing Community Land Trusts as a possible model for collective ownership of land and democratic decision-making. Finally, through the results of Community-Based Participatory Research with the New York City Community Land Initiative, the third component explores how regional coordination can serve to ground CLTs in a more democratic process for community control.

Foreword

When I began the Master of Environmental Studies Planning (MES) program, I sought to better understand how urban planning processes served to both entrench and address social and environmental injustice in the cities that I had come to call home throughout my life, particularly Vancouver, Barcelona, New York and Toronto. Over the course of my first year in the program, I came to develop an analysis of the role of global capital and real estate investment in the urban restructuring that was reducing these vibrant cities to mere centres of capital accumulation. Through this process, I became increasingly interested in how local residents can gain control of local investment, thereby shaping the neighbourhood after their own desires.

As I travelled down this road, I found myself at an exciting intersection of community organizing and affordable housing in New York City, that being the emerging Community Land Trust movement. This ultimately led me to focus on how community control of land can serve to mitigate displacement. Through this, I was able to delve into the Areas of Concentration identified in my Plan of Study and develop both a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of neighbourhood change, participatory planning and community-controlled land. In doing so, the need to explore my own complicity in the process of urban restructuring became increasingly apparent to me. Because of this, my portfolio adopts a multi-scalar approach to understanding neighbourhood change, displacement and community organizing in the city I somewhat unexpectedly came to call home for much of my time in the MES program.

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I would like to acknowledge all those who provided their invaluable support during this research process. First, I would like to thank my thoughtful and supportive advisor and supervisor, Dr. Luisa Sotomayor for providing insight and guidance throughout my journey in the Master of Environmental Studies Planning program. I would also like to thank all the other faculty members, as well as my classmates, for allowing me to deepen my analysis of planning issues through thought-provoking debates, discussions and lectures.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the New York City Community Land Initiative, and their role in facilitating and guiding some of my research. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work with Community Land Trusts across New York City, as well as with scholars, advocates and organizers fighting to build a more just and equitable city. I would also like to acknowledge MITACS and the Faculty of Graduate Studies for providing the financial support necessary to carry out my research in New York City.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family, my network of friends and many roommates who supported me during some of the personal, professional and academic challenges that arose during this process. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my step father, Martin Baker, for being a source of inspiration and a mentor throughout my life, always pushing me to think critically about the rampant injustices that shape our society. It is to him that I dedicate this research.

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Introduction

When I began the Master of Environmental Studies Planning program, I sought to better understand how urban planning processes served to both entrench and address social and environmental injustice in the cities that I had come to call home throughout my life. Over the course of my first year in the program, I came to develop an analysis of the role of global capital and real estate investment in the urban restructuring that was reducing these vibrant cities to mere centres of capital accumulation. Through this, I became increasingly interested in how local residents can gain control over local investment, thereby shaping neighbourhood change after their own desires rather than at the whims of speculative investment.

This analysis ultimately led me to take on a field placement with Community Solutions, a non-profit organization operating across the United States. During my placement, I worked with the Brownsville Partnership in Brooklyn, which sought to address the root causes of homelessness in the neighbourhood. This neighbourhood, Brownsville, has not only experienced decades of severe disinvestment, but is also home to the highest concentration of public housing in the United States. Despite this history of disinvestment, the wave of gentrification sweeping across Brooklyn has begun to threaten Brownsville, resulting in rapidly escalating rents in the lowest income neighbourhood in the borough.

As a result of this looming threat of displacement for local residents, the focus of the Brownsville Partnership shifted from fostering employment opportunities to acquiring vacant city-owned properties to create a Community Land Trust (CLT). Through this, I was exposed to local CLT organizing, particularly through the work of the New York City Community Land Initiative. I had the opportunity to attend a session of the Learning Exchange, which was a two-year peer learning program to support capacity development for emerging and expanding CLTs. My involvement in both the Brownsville CLT and the Learning Exchange ultimately led me to focus on exploring the notion of community control and the Community Land Trust model through my research. Since my interest in community-controlled land originated from my direct involvement in a CLT, I felt compelled to adopt a participatory and collaborative approach to this research.

Furthermore, throughout the research process, I became increasingly aware of the complexities of neighbourhood change, which ultimately encouraged me to develop a multi-scalar analysis of global capital, urban transformation, displacement and community organizing. As a result, this

portfolio applies a variety of methods to explore the nuances of neighbourhood change and community control from a high-level analysis of the historical legacy of dispossession to my own personal experience as an unsuspecting gentrifier in Brooklyn's increasingly trendy Bushwick. The following section outlines the methods employed to carry out this research, while providing additional context for the portfolio.

Methodology

This research was conducted through a combination of a literature review, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), observation, semi-structured interviews and an autoethnography.

Literature Review

In order to understand the local context of housing policy, land use and community organizing in New York City, I conducted a literature review of academic articles as well as white and gray papers. The aim of the literature review was first to understand the root causes of racial and economic segregation and displacement that continues to shape the city's urban landscape. The literature review explored the historical use of redlining, as well as past and current research on gentrification and rezonings, in order to better understand the impacts of these policies. The second aim of the literature review was to explore viable alternatives to speculative real estate development, with a particular focus on Community Land Trusts (CLTs). This involved a literature scan of established CLTs, such as Cooper Square in New York City, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston and the Caño Martín Peña CLT in Puerto Rico. In order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of CLTs as a model for more equitable development, I also explored peer-reviewed articles and gray literature on the relationship between CLTs, community empowerment, and gentrification. Overall, the literature review served to shed light on the local context, community organizing efforts, land use and housing policies that facilitated or hindered different communities' ability to form Community Land Trusts, while informing the context and theoretical framework of this research.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In order to delve deeper into the challenges and opportunities for CLT land acquisition and stewardship, I also conducted 4 semi-structured interviews with community organizers, researchers and CLT advocates in New York City. Interviewees were selected based on their involvement with NYCCLI, CLT organizing, coalition building, and advocacy. The interview questions were informed by the literature review, and catered to each interviewee's area of expertise, with different questions for community organizers, advocates and those involved in coalition building.

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

In order to ensure that the communities involved in this research were able to hold power throughout the process, I carried out Community-Based Participatory Research with the New York City Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI) as my primary community partner. Community-Based Participatory Research “has evolved as an effective new research paradigm that attempts to make research a more inclusive and democratic process by fostering the development of partnerships between communities and academics to address community-relevant research priorities” (Flicker et al., 2007, p. 478). Another important component of CBPR is that it contributes to organizational capacity development, which also serves to ground the research in local knowledge and the lived experience of the community (Flicker et al., 2007).

As a result, the first step in this process involved working directly with NYCCLI to inform the goals of this research. In doing so, we determined that the main research priority was to conduct a needs assessment to better understand the current organizational capacity, strengths and weaknesses of established and emerging CLTs in New York City. Broadly, the goal was to determine how NYCCLI could continue to support CLT development beyond the culmination of their monthly Learning Exchange sessions in June 2019. More specifically, the aim of this research was to determine which organizational needs can be consolidated through NYCCLI and which functions are specific to each CLT.

Through this process, I had the opportunity to observe how CLT members, organizers and researchers engaged with each other in the context of the Learning Exchange facilitated by NYCCLI. I attended four sessions of the Learning Exchange, as well as one NYCCLI membership meeting between February and May 2019. Topics covered in the Learning

Exchange included community organizing, development and financing, partnerships and stewardship. This allowed me to build relationships with local CLT organizers and gain an understanding of the coalition building efforts that NYCCLI is currently facilitating. Through the Learning Exchange, I also participated in two visits to sites slated for CLT development in Brownsville and in Cypress Hills in Brooklyn.

In order to conduct the needs assessments, I collaborated with NYCCLI members and staff to compile relevant background information from previous meetings with CLT organizers. We then adapted existing NYCCLI resources to build the needs assessment, which included a series of questions and a capacity sharing activity (see Appendix). The questions served to ascertain what steps the CLTs had taken since August 2018, as well as any changes in their organizational needs since then, including staff and legal support. The questions also set the stage for the capacity sharing activity, which helped determine what each CLTs strengths were, while envisioning the future of city-wide CLT coordination. Both the questions and capacity sharing grid were then reviewed by NYCCLI board members.

The needs assessment was then completed by one established and seven emerging CLTs in New York City. The capacity sharing grid was consolidated, and the answers to the questions were summarized in order to demonstrate the overlapping needs, strengths and opportunities for CLTs in New York City. The final component of this portfolio provides an overview of the findings from the needs assessments.

Autoethnography

The process of conducting Community-Based Participatory Research prompted self-reflection, ultimately leading me to question my own role in propelling the process of urban change that I sought to better understand. I felt that this was particularly relevant given the aim of my research to analyze the challenges that communities face in resisting displacement, particularly when confronted with the momentum of neighbourhood change. Because of this, I chose to adopt an autoethnographic approach to the first component of this portfolio.

Autoethnography can be described as an “approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). Through an autoethnographic approach

to research we are able to challenge the role of the researcher as detached from the phenomenon we are seeking to explore. This approach is grounded in the notion that research is political, while striving to provide a framework for academic exploration through a socially-just and socially conscious act (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). Furthermore, autoethnography “hinges on the push and pull between and among analysis and evocation, personal experience and larger social, cultural, and political concerns” (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008, p. 3-4). This seemed particularly relevant given my complicity in the process of urban change I was seeking to explore. As Marcuse points out (2010) “if we do not understand and do not intuitively put ourselves in the place of those whose problems we examine, we will not understand them — either the people or the problems” (p. 187).

The following section provides a brief overview of the structure of this portfolio, outlining how each component fits within the overall aim to provide a multi-scalar exploration of neighbourhood change and community organizing.

Portfolio Structure

This portfolio consists of three components. The first component is an autoethnographic exploration into my own role as a gentrifier living in a loft in Bushwick while carrying out this research. Though I initially had no intention of making myself the protagonist of my research, my complicity in the process of urban change in this rapidly gentrifying (or perhaps already gentrified) neighbourhood made it impossible for me to approach this research without exploring my own role in the urban transformation I sought to better understand. This autoethnography also serves to provide context for the particular planning issues driving the process of neighbourhood change. In particular, it highlights the contentious role of community planning processes, rezonings and industrial to residential conversions that are shaping New York City today.

The second component of the portfolio approaches neighbourhood change through a high-level analysis of urban transformation by proposing an argument for the need for community control. It aims to highlight the legacy of racial exclusion resulting from discriminatory land use policies, and the role of private property ownership as a mechanism for dispossession for low-income communities and people of colour. With this context in mind, the article proposes community control of land as a strategy for reparations, collective wealth building and as a mechanism to

address displacement resulting from increased investment in low-income neighbourhoods. The article specifically proposes Community Land Trusts as a potential approach to providing local control in areas that have experienced decades of disinvestment and are now facing development-driven displacement. In doing so, the article also argues for the need for CLTs to remain rooted in local control rather than becoming a tool to facilitate access to private homeownership. It then highlights strategies that have been implemented to support the mission of CLTs as mechanisms for community control, ranging from multi-sectoral organizing to regional coordination.

The final component of the portfolio provides an overview of the results of the Community-Based Participatory Research conducted in collaboration with the New York City Community Land Initiative. It summarizes the results of the needs assessment, highlighting the collective strengths, popular education and technical assistance needs of emerging and expanding CLTs in New York City. It also outlines some of the main barriers facing CLTs in the city, as well as the functions that can be coordinated at a city-wide level. The results of this research are currently being used to help guide NYCCLI's next steps in providing support through advocacy, popular education, community organizing, fundraising and legal support for CLTs in New York City. This report can also serve to outline some of the functions that can be streamlined by a city-wide or regional coordinating agency in areas with multiple emerging and expanding CLTs.

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Bushwick from the Eyes of an Unsuspecting Gentrifier

Over the three months I spent living in Bushwick, my role in propelling gentrification became increasingly apparent to me. I often sat in the neighbourhood's vibrant Maria Hernandez Park, inevitably distracted from my readings by the constant flow of people crossing or using the park. Latinx teens drinking slushies on their way home from school. Tattoo covered young white hipsters sitting on benches sipping Americanos. A Black family of four all drinking water from a fountain behind me, with one child climbing up the fountain and a toddler hanging from his mother's arms. In many ways, this park is truly representative of the urban transformation that has been rapidly spreading across Brooklyn. This diverse urban ecosystem was certainly part of what drew me to the neighbourhood to begin with. But after only three months in Bushwick, I felt the weight of my presence as a gentrifier and a signal of the changes that are well underway, from the threat of a future rezoning to the increasingly ubiquitous industrial to residential conversions that are shaping the neighbourhood.

So, how could I not write a piece to expose my own positionality in this urban process, in which I am not only enmeshed in, but complicit in perpetuating? In an attempt to examine my own relationship to the processes of urban change, this piece seeks to reduce the "artificial distance in accounts of gentrification" between researchers and processes of urban change that plagues academic discourse on displacement (Schlichtman and Patch, 2013, p. 1491). It is a response to Marcuse's warning that "if we do not understand and do not intuitively put ourselves in the place of those whose problems we examine, we will not understand them — either the people or the problems" (Marcuse, 2010, p. 187). Through this article, I hope to situate myself in the process of gentrification in Bushwick and Brooklyn.

Given that "gentrification is not a single storming of the city" and is instead "an ongoing, complicated project intertwined with other processes," it is important to understand this restructuring of urban space from both the micro and macro level (Schlichtman and Patch, 2013, p. 1502). This article is in no way an attempt to undermine the deeply structural and systemic nature of gentrification and displacement, but instead takes capitalism, neoliberal planning, and inequitable urban investment as a given (Stein, 2019; Marcuse & Madden, 2016). Instead, this article is an attempt to add a human dimension to the micro-level analysis of individual choice, agency, and consumption patterns that also come to shape neighbourhoods.

Meanwhile, it seeks to connect the micro and macro-level, through a contextual analysis of the interplay between broader legislative and structural pressures propelling gentrification. In particular, it discusses my own unintended complicity in the expansion of the contentious Loft Law, as well as the community planning process and the proposed rezoning of the neighbourhood.

Situating myself in gentrifying Bushwick

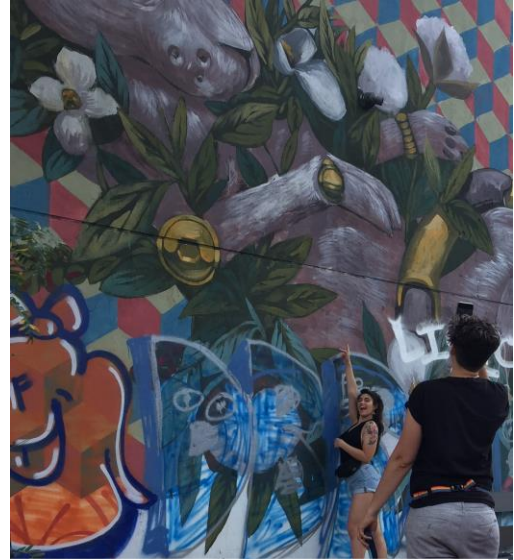
In order to reflect on my relationship to the process of gentrification by situating myself within it, I have adopted the diagnostic tool proposed by Schlichtman and Patch (2013). This tool uses six interconnected 'pull' factors (economic, practical, aesthetic, amenity, social and symbolic), combined with the flexibility around inconvenience that often characterizes decisions made by gentrifiers. The tool also allows us to explore the "interrelated effects on longer-term residents: displacement, signaling and cultural change" (Schlichtman and Patch, 2013, p. 1493). I use this tool to explore what drew me to Bushwick, and the gentrifying effects of my presence in the neighbourhood.

As a first-generation Catalan-Persian Canadian who has traditionally felt more like I was bringing down the average income of a neighbourhood, it was difficult to anticipate my role as a gentrifier. I was drawn to living in a Hispanic neighbourhood, for both its social and symbolic pull. As a Spanish-speaker, I felt that a linguistic connection to the neighbourhood would allow me to feel a greater sense of community. Meanwhile, I felt a symbolic pull towards Bushwick for its bustling commercial corridors and public spaces, which were reminiscent of the streets and cemented plazas of my Catalan hometown, Tarragona, and its neighbouring metropolis, Barcelona. In retrospect, both the symbolic and social draws were based on highly reductionist notions of linguistic, urbanistic and cultural commonalities. I also overlooked the extent to which racial "diversity" has served as a signal of gentrification in New York City, and ultimately did not realize that my light skin and predominantly European facial features would make me just as much of an outsider as a sixth-generation Irish American.

The aesthetic and amenity pull of Bushwick was also somewhat appealing, though I found the character of this gentrifying neighbourhood to be ultimately too 'hip' for my liking. The tourists photographing murals, and the ubiquity of trendy coffee shops and bars did little to pique my interest in the neighbourhood. It was instead the affordable Puerto Rican grocers, and loud

reggaeton overflowing into the streets that played a more significant role in my draw to Bushwick. And like other young gentrifiers, I was charmed by the ‘grit’ that draws so many of us to low-income neighbourhoods of colour.

Aesthetics, amenities, symbolic and social pull factors aside, what ultimately led me to live in Bushwick was the relative affordability and centrality of my dingy room in an illegal loft, which was conveniently located on the same block as the Jefferson Street L Train¹ stop. Through I knew I was moving into a traditionally Puerto Rican neighbourhood that was undergoing gentrification, my naivete led me to believe that by living in an old loft with four roommates, at least I wasn’t contributing to direct residential displacement. That being said, I was aware of my presence as a signal and indicator of a process of urban change that was already well underway. Specifically, I knew that as a white-passing student, I was walking proof to potential residents and real estate capitalists that Bushwick is a good place for large-scale development of condominiums as well as more vintage clothing boutiques and artisanal coffee shops. To some extent, I understood my complicity in contributing to socio-cultural change in the neighbourhood, though this became increasingly apparent, and truly started to weigh on me when I encountered the writing on the graffiti-covered bathroom wall of a gentrifying coffee shop that I occasionally frequented. “If you pay the rent here then you need to die. GO away trustfunder. You suck” it said. Both my presence as a white-passing student and my desire for Americanos were ultimately fueling the competition over the cultural landscape between young white hipsters and working-class Puerto Rican families.



A tourist photographing a mural
Photo credit: Aida Mas



The writing on the graffiti-covered wall of a gentrifying coffee shop
Photo credit: Aida Mas

¹ Despite the lack of predictability and impending subway closure, it was undeniably convenient to live so close to a subway that could get me into Manhattan in less than 20 minutes.

Living in the North Brooklyn Industrial Business Zone



*A street view of my building at the edge of the North Brooklyn IBZ
Photo credit: Aida Mas*

Prior to my arrival to Bushwick, I had overlooked the complexity of these interconnected urban processes, underestimating how my decision to live in an illegal loft contributed to a much broader trend of economic displacement. As I quickly learned, similar to the story of neighbouring Williamsburg in the 1990s and 2000s, gentrification in Bushwick is largely being propelled by the loss of industrial and manufacturing spaces to residential lofts. This was particularly relevant in the case of the spacious and seemingly unfinished loft I was living in, which I quickly came to learn was at the border of the contentious North Brooklyn Industrial Business Zone (IBZ).

IBZs form the industrial backbone of New York City, providing a high concentration of employment, as well as tax incentives and a commitment from the city to refrain from rezoning these areas for residential use. In terms of employment, the North Brooklyn IBZ is part of the third largest industrial hub in New York City, with 19,500 jobs as of 2016, 77% of which are industrial (City of New York, Department of City Planning, 2018). The area includes 1,066 acres across Greenpoint, East Williamsburg and Bushwick. The IBZ is also adjacent to Newtown Creek, which has been “a major hub of large-scale industry since the early 1800s when industries such as shipbuilding and kerosene and petroleum refineries were attracted by both strategic waterway access and a location in the geographic center of New York City” (City of New York, Department of City Planning, 2018, iv). Due to the economic and industrial significance of this area, New York City’s Department of City Planning engaged in a community outreach process in 2015, involving public meetings, interviews, roundtables and an in-depth analysis of existing conditions in the area. This resulted in the creation of the North Brooklyn Industry and Innovation Plan, which was released in November of 2018. The Plan outlines a land use framework and recommendations in order to increase jobs in the neighbourhood to

reduce commutes and encourage counter-commuting, increase density to support the growth of industrial businesses, while creating new space for other emerging forms of employment in Bushwick, such as technology and media (City of New York, Department of City Planning, 2018, iv).

Industrial Displacement and The Loft Law

Despite the City's commitment to protecting IBZs by prohibiting residential conversions, attempts to provide affordable housing in "naturally occurring creative districts" in New York City's "soft industrial underbellies" (Zukin & Braslow, 2011) have resulted in exemptions in the North Brooklyn IBZ through the Loft Law. The Loft Law was originally passed in 1982 to formalize and regulate residential conversions in industrial zones, with the intent of providing tenants with protection from landlord harassment and eviction, while ensuring that lofts conformed to current building codes. Initially, the Loft Law primarily protected residences in Lower Manhattan through rent-stabilized residential units in formerly industrial lofts. In 2010, the Loft Law was expanded to provide the same protections to lofts in the outer boroughs, and primarily in Brooklyn, where there has been an influx of artists since the 1990s (Zukin & Braslow, 2011).

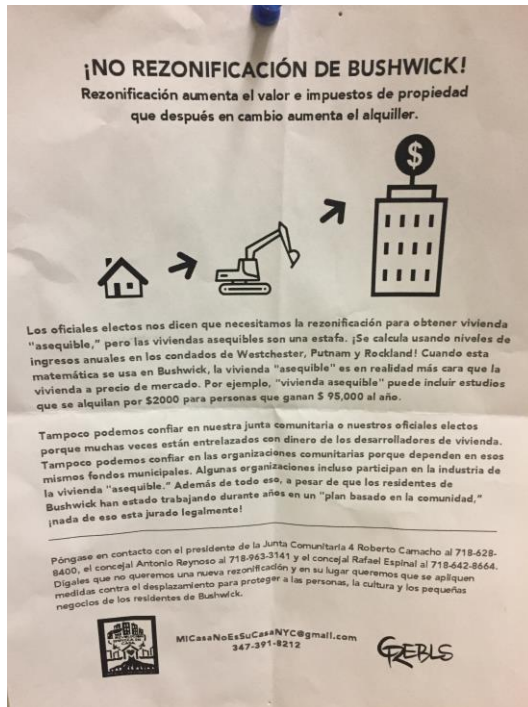


Bushwick's loft expansion promoted in East Williamsburg

Photo credit: Aida Mas

On the surface, an expansion of the Loft Law may appear to be a laudable cause for elected officials and planners to pursue. Unfortunately, as is often the case with complex urban issues, the Loft Law and the proposed expansion of eligibility for residential conversions by Senator Julia Salazar and Manhattan Assembly Member Deborah Glick may lead to a cascading effect

of unintended consequences. In fact, the expansion of the Loft Law is perceived as a threat to industrial businesses, especially in gentrifying areas such as East Williamsburg and Bushwick, where manufacturing provides economic opportunities in the form of well-paying working class jobs to many people of colour ([Spivack](#), 2019). This is particularly relevant in Bushwick, where over 20% of residents in Bushwick work in the industrial sector (City of New York, Department of City Planning, 2018).



Opposition to the rezoning of Bushwick in my building
Photo credit: Aida Mas

As Council Member Antonio Reynoso pointed out in a [statement](#) (February, 25, 2019), the existing loft law has already had significant negative impacts on working class people of colour in North Brooklyn. The proposed Loft Law expansion would facilitate the transition from industrial to residential, ultimately encouraging further residential rezonings of North Brooklyn's industrial land. As he clearly states: "By placing an exemption in the loft law for these areas in North Brooklyn, the bill will completely undermine existing and planned industrial protections and catalyze economic gentrification, furthering the already rampant residential displacement in our community. We cannot let the political ghosts of the past² continue to drive bad policy" (Reynoso, February 25, 2019).

Though the urgent need for affordable housing in New York City is undeniable, in a [letter](#) to Senator Salazar, the Industrial Jobs Coalition points out that "the solution to that problem is to build and preserve truly affordable housing, not to incentivize the illegal conversion of space that has been designated as a manufacturing zone" (February 27, 2019). In this letter, the Industrial Jobs Coalition also raises concerns about the expansion of the Loft Law into the North Brooklyn

² The "political ghosts of the past" refers to Assembly Member Vito J. Lopez, who proposed an expansion to the Loft Law in 3 of the 16 IBZs in New York City. The contentious bill was passed in June of 2010 (Haughney, 2010).

IBZ, as it would ultimately just pave the way for additional residential conversions, significantly undermining the North Brooklyn Industry and Innovation Plan.

In addition to the loss of manufacturing jobs and industrial land, the Loft Law may also threaten the stability of the artists and other lower-income gentrifiers they seek to protect. As Zukin and Braslow (2011, p. 139) warn, “New York-style regularization is a double-edged sword.” This is due to the tendency for these “creative” neighbourhoods to become more appealing to higher-income residents who are not artists. This leads to further gentrification, ultimately displacing the artists that initiated this process of urban transformation. Because of this, in the case of New York City “designating a naturally occurring artists’ neighborhood a creative district is the death knell of creativity (and the beginning of higher rents)” (Zukin & Braslow, 2011, p. 139).

Finally, Council Member Reynoso also points out that the “expansion of the loft law is essentially a large-scale residential rezoning of our City’s industrial zones” and ultimately a “matter of racial equity” (February 25, 2019). He also alludes to the opaque process lacking accountability, as no community-based organizations were consulted, resulting in the exclusion of the voices of working-class people of colour that rely on industrial and manufacturing jobs in the North Brooklyn IBZ.

The Bushwick Community Plan

The history of exclusion of working-class people of colour from local land use changes and planning processes has resulted in a long history of community planning efforts across New York City. In response to city-led urban renewal programs intended to transform low-income communities into middle-class enclaves, activists, community organizers and radical planners worked together to create New York City’s first community plans (Angotti, 2008). In 1961, activist Frances Goldin, planner Walter Thabit and the Cooper Square Committee developed New York City’s first community plan to fight evictions and displacement resulting from urban renewal in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. The Alternate Plan for Cooper Square was adopted nine years later and has served as a celebrated precedent for subsequent community planning efforts in the city (Angotti, 2008). There are now over 100 community plans in New York City, which together “represent perhaps one of the largest collections of community-initiated plans in the world” (Angotti, 2008, p. 5).

A more recent community planning initiative began in 2014 in Bushwick in response to rapid development in the neighbourhood. More specifically, the Bushwick Community Plan was initiated as a request for rezoning by the local Community Board in order to restrict out-of-context development in the neighbourhood. In response to the local Community Board, Council Members Antonio Reynoso and Rafael Espinal “initiated a community-based planning process, inviting residents and local organizations to create a vision for Bushwick’s future” (Bushwick Community Plan, 2018, 12).



Out-of-context residential development in industrial Bushwick

Photo credit: Aida Mas

The Bushwick Community Plan was the result of four years of collaboration between community organizations, residents, city agencies and elected officials. Released in 2018, the Plan states that “Bushwick deserves investments from the City to preserve existing affordable housing, upgrade infrastructure, and improve employment opportunities and neighborhood services. Rather than reacting to real estate plans and playing catch up, a proactive plan that can help the community determine its own future” (Bushwick Community Plan, 2018, 10). Despite the comprehensive community planning that went into its development, the Plan has also been criticized by local anti-displacement activists such as Mi Casa No Es Su Casa³ who oppose any rezoning or formal engagement with city planning agencies. This is primarily because Bushwick was not initially slated for rezoning, and some groups believe that the community planning process drew more attention to the neighbourhood, ultimately resulting in a city-led rezoning proposal that does not reflect the priorities of the Bushwick Community Plan. That being said, given the current rezoning patterns in New York City, it seems unlikely that Bushwick would have remained under the radar for much longer regardless of community planning efforts. In

³ Mi Casa No Es Su Casa: Illumination Against Gentrification is a Bushwick-based collective of anti-displacement activists that create signs to draw attention to gentrification in low-income neighbourhoods across New York City. In many cases, their work is centered around raising awareness of the role of art and artists in propelling gentrification.

fact, it seems likely that without the Bushwick Community Plan, the neighbourhood would face a more aggressive rezoning process.

Currently, there are a few key distinctions between the community-based plan and the city-led rezoning. One of the main areas of concern is due to the city's proposed industrial to residential conversions in the neighbourhood, which the Bushwick Community Plan explicitly opposes (2018, p. 30). Furthermore, despite the focus on preservation and opposition to the development of market rate housing in the Bushwick Community Plan, the city-led rezoning calls for more than 8,000 units of market rate housing (Kully, 2019).

These departures from the Bushwick Community Plan serve to demonstrate the limitations and challenges that community planning efforts face when attempting to provide more democratic control of local resources and development. They also point to the complicity of the state in propelling the process of exclusion and dispossession in low-income communities of colour, and the need to adopt a diversity of approaches and tactics to address the pervasive forces of gentrification and displacement. The following article provides a more in-depth analysis of the barriers to fostering more equitable development within the context of neoliberal capitalism.

Conclusion

This article attempts to present the complexities of urban change by exploring my own complicity in the process of gentrification through a multi-scalar analysis. In doing so, it explores how the choices of young, educated, and often white, individuals can both initiate and catalyze urban change by redefining the identity of a neighbourhood. Through this autoethnographic exploration, I attempt to better understand how my personal decisions contribute to the displacement of low-income communities, a process which we should be working to address rather than perpetuate. As Marcuse (2015) points out,

“The actions of young researchers studying gentrification impose ethical obligations on them. These obligations include involvement in collective and political actions that are likely to contribute as much (or more) to curing the ills of gentrification as their choice of where to live. It is their obligation to draw conclusions from their own research, and as they learn more of the injustice that gentrification causes, to become actively engaged in the fight

against it, to use their research skills to spread recognition of those injustices” (p. 1268-9).

As a result, throughout my time in Bushwick, I was involved in exploring community-based strategies to mitigate displacement, particularly through mechanisms to secure local control over investment and provide much needed affordable housing in low-income neighbourhoods. In particular, I focused on the role of Community Land Trusts in providing collective ownership and decision-making power to traditionally marginalized communities. The rest of this portfolio focuses on the challenges Community Land Trusts face in a context of neoliberal capitalism, as well as my work with the New York City Community Land Initiative.

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Community Land Trusts as a Mechanism for Community Control: From Multi-Sectoral Organizing to Regional Coordination

Introduction

The commodification of housing and speculation of land are playing a key role in shaping cities around the world, creating centres of control for capital markets catering primarily to the needs of the elite (Stein, 2019; Marcuse & Madden, 2016; Smith, 2002; Borja & Castells, 1997). As a result of these global speculative forces, low-income – and often racially segregated – communities are facing mounting pressure to leave the neighbourhoods they call home. This displacement is the result of the restructuring of space through market mechanisms that gradually replace historically working-class communities with more affluent residents (Hackworth, 2007). This process is generally described as gentrification, though this sanitized and catch-all word does little to illustrate the profoundly inequitable roots and implications of racialized and class-based displacement (Roy, 2017).

Displacement resulting from this increasingly ubiquitous process of urban transformation now threatens many vulnerable communities, particularly in expanding centres of real estate investment, such as New York City and Toronto (Marcuse & Madden, 2016; Zukin et al., 2009; Harvey, 2003; Hackworth, 2002; Smith 2002). In response, some communities have organized to fight against displacement by creating strategies to provide local control over investment and maintain housing affordability, food security, and access to transportation. Some of these strategies are rooted in community control of land as an emancipatory tool for social and environmental justice, such as Community Land Trusts (CLTs) (Marcuse & Madden, 2016; Davis, 2014).

Despite these efforts, the immense barriers for acquiring land and funding, combined with the institutional pressures to conform to the prevailing neoliberal and capitalist urban economy often detract from the transformative mission of Community Land Trusts (DeFilippis et al., 2018, Williams, 2018). This article aims to outline some of the challenges that CLTs face in attempting to decommodify land through local control and stewardship. In order to do so, it begins by providing an overview of the current context of urban restructuring, and the complicity of the state in perpetuating racialized displacement. This is followed by an argument for the need to

foster community control of land as a strategy for addressing the legacy of exclusion that shapes cities around the world.

In order to illustrate the particular barriers to gaining and maintaining community control in the context of neoliberalism, this article explores grassroots strategies for challenging private property ownership, through an overview anti-eviction organizing and Community Land Trusts. Ultimately, the article focuses on how CLTs, as an often-celebrated model of community control, can serve as a mechanism to democratize land. In doing so, it also outlines the ideological and institutional barriers that have resulted in a departure from the model's initial emancipatory approach to land stewardship, leading it to become more widely used as a technocratic tool for affordable private homeownership. The article concludes with some contexts and strategies that have served to ground CLTs in democratic decision-making and community control of land, particularly through comprehensive community planning efforts, multi-sectoral organizing and regional coordination in the United States.

Neoliberalism and Private Property

In cities around the world, the forces of neoliberalism have resulted in the notion that our basic needs, such as the need for housing, “must be placed under the control of a fully unfettered market sector and maintained through individualized property ownership in order to achieve maximum exchange value or profit to build wealth” (Lowe & Thaden, 2016, p. 612). This primacy of private land ownership has served as a tool for both historical and current systematic exclusion and oppression for low income communities and people of colour. In fact, both the state and the private market “use the power to exclude, which is central to private property, to displace, evict and remove the poor” (Blomley, 2008, p. 316). Historically in the United States, this was accomplished through redlining and other discriminatory land use policies which excluded people of colour from accessing homeownership. These same communities that endured decades of segregation and disinvestment have now become the locus of current displacement (Stein, 2019).

Meanwhile, an urban economy based on private property has also created the necessary preconditions for the commodification of land and speculation of housing (Marcuse & Madden, 2016). As real estate speculation expands, the state has become ever more complicit in perpetuating an exclusionary housing market. This has been done by providing massive

incentives for individual homeownership, tax breaks for developers, rezoning low-income neighbourhoods to pave the way for luxury development, while facilitating predatory lending and the privatization of public housing (Stein, 2019; Marcuse & Madden, 2016). The result has been a severe lack of adequate housing around the globe, with the United States experiencing some of the most devastating and inequitable impacts of the housing crisis (Hoover, 2015). From massive disinvestment in public housing to the 2007 mortgage crisis, more and more low-income people have been forced into a precarious housing market, pushing the most vulnerable into homelessness or substandard housing (Hoover, 2015).

“Gentrification” and Displacement

“Gentrification is just capitalism spatialized. It’s just how capitalism plays out on land.” (CLT advocate in New York City, Interview, May 6, 2019)

Over the last several decades, the unquestioned dominance of private property and the commodification of land and housing have resulted in the restructuring of urban space (Stein, 2019; Newman & Wyly, 2006). Historically, this resulted in urban disinvestment and white flight to the suburbs, creating a deeply entrenched legacy of racial segregation. More recently, the renewed attraction to denser urban environments for whiter, wealthier, and more educated residents has resulted in displacement for many low-income residents from parts of the city that were previously deemed undesirable or unsafe (Newman & Wyly, 2006). As a result, urban areas that have been historically affected by disinvestment and decaying infrastructure are increasingly identified by investors and policy elites as “opportunity zones” for profitable redevelopment at the expense of vulnerable and low-income residents (Slater, 2011). Often, this restructuring of urban space through development-driven displacement is termed gentrification.

Gentrification is often described as the “displacement of a lower-income population by a higher-income one through some combination of three forms of upgrading: Economic upgrading—uppricing, Physical upgrading—redevelopment, Social upgrading—upscaling” (Marcuse, 2015, p. 1264).⁴ Not only has this process of upgrading resulted in the displacement of low-income communities, but it has also led to the diffusion of political power and organized community

⁴ Unlike processes such as urban renewal which were state-led, these forms of upgrading are driven by the market, though they still requires the state to pave the way for redevelopment and rezonings (Marcuse, 2015).

networks. In some cases, this disintegration of the community is seen as one of the most pervasive effects of gentrification (Batancur, 2011), a process which has been described as “place-taking rather than place-making” (Angotti, 2012, p. 103). As a result of these pressures, “low-income residents who manage to resist displacement may enjoy a few benefits from the changes brought by gentrification, but these bittersweet fruits are quickly rotting as the supports for low-income renters are steadily dismantled” (Newman & Wyly, 2006, p. 52).

Displacement caused by gentrification is tied to broader inequities based on race, class, gender and ethnicity (Newman & Wyly, 2006). Because of this, some scholars and community organizers have identified a need for a term that more accurately captures the pervasive racial discrimination that characterizes urban displacement. Though often used as a catch-all phrase to describe the replacement of low-income communities of colour by whiter, more affluent communities, the term gentrification seems insufficient when it comes to capturing the true nature of racialized displacement.

From Gentrification to Racial Banishment

“We are telling you that what we are experiencing cannot any longer be explained as gentrification. We are experiencing banishment. Give us a theory of banishment. Give us the history of banishment.” (Pete White of LA CAN, quoted in Roy, 2017, p. 10)

It should come as no surprise that in a country that built its wealth off the backs of people of colour through slavery, redlining and the financialization of housing, the legacy of spatial and economic segregation has resulted in a highly inequitable distribution of privilege (Coates, 2014). In fact, the racial biases, discrimination and segregation in the United States’ “housing and financial services markets have cost the current generation of blacks about \$82 billion, with the disparity in home equity averaging \$20,000 for those holding mortgages” (Squires & Kubrin, 2012, p. 348). Meanwhile, current income and wealth disparities based on race perpetuate the economic exclusion of people of colour, often relegating them to areas where they are exposed to environmental hazards and pollutants. This injustice leads many low-income communities of colour to experience higher rates of hospitalization for environmentally-induced illnesses. For example, “while the hospital admission rate for asthma in the state of New York is 1.8 per 1,000, it is three times higher in the Mott Haven area of the South Bronx” (Squires & Kubrin, 2012, p. 349).

Current land use policies and urban investment patterns serve to exacerbate these inequities by facilitating processes of neighbourhood change that continue to favour wealthy white residents over people of colour. Because of this, the term gentrification is increasingly identified as insufficient when it comes to capturing the legacy of exclusion and the pervasive nature of racialized displacement. In particular, it lacks a critical analysis of race and class, and ultimately sanitizes the term, distancing it from the devastating dispossession faced by low-income communities and people of colour (Roy, 2017). Instead, the term racial banishment has been used to highlight the “persistent racialization of space” that drives the current processes of urban restructuring (Roy, 2017, p. 8). This “framework highlights the public means of evictions as well as forms of racialized violence, such as slavery, Jim Crow, incarceration, colonialism, and apartheid, that cannot be encapsulated within sanitized notions of gentrification and displacement” (Roy 2017, p. 3).

The State as a Catalyst for Dispossession

The pervasive role of the state as a catalyst for dispossession and displacement based on race and class also highlights the need to expand our understanding of the process of urban change beyond the notion of “gentrification.” This is particularly relevant given the legacy of disinvestment in low-income communities and communities of colour and the current context of neoliberal capitalism, where “gentrification appears to many as an ideal solution to long-term urban decay” (Newman & Wyly, 2006, p. 26). Because of this, the state has played an increasingly aggressive role in perpetuating urban displacement processes, in many cases acting as a catalyst to encourage gentrification (Stein, 2019; Newman & Wyly, 2006; Smith, 2002; Hackworth & Smith, 2001). This is done through a variety of approaches ranging from rezoning low-income neighbourhoods to implementing bicycle infrastructure, but is ultimately aimed at increasing property values, which inevitably leads to displacement for low-income residents (Stein, 2019). The result has been a shift from disinvestment plaguing low-income communities to a lack of control over more recent waves of private and public investment (DeFilippis, 2002). In response, communities have organized to oppose the speculative forces and government complicity in propelling displacement, while providing their own solutions for fighting racial banishment. From these efforts, a number of forms of resistance have emerged, including a growing interest in efforts to “collectively own and govern resources as alternatives

to corporate models of resource distribution that foster increasing inequality around the globe” (Williams, 2018, p. 2).

The fight for collective control of land has taken a variety of forms, ranging from informal strategies such as squatting and occupation to state-sanctioned approaches such as a Community Land Trusts. The following section is not intended to be exhaustive, but aims to provide an example of one informal and one formal strategy that is being employed to challenge the commodification of land and consequent displacement.

Anti-Eviction Defense & Occupation

“Taking over housing or land is a political act to highlight injustice and enact the transformation sought. This act, even when it is only temporary, actively builds communities on a radically different basis from a commodity-based understanding of housing.” (Hoover, 2015, p. 1102)

One of the most pervasive manifestations of the commodification and financialization of land was the widespread dispossession that took place following the global financial crisis of 2007-2008. From the mass evictions that ravaged the Spanish economy and the lives of its residents, to predatory lending and the foreclosure crisis in the United States, evictions have become “not only personal catastrophes but communal, highlighting the vulnerability of homeowners and the power of lenders over our collective lives” (Hoover, 2015, p. 1101). In response, communities from Chicago to Barcelona have politicized evictions by organizing campaigns and, in many cases, occupying foreclosed properties.

One example of this is the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign (CAEC), which “has been concerned with confronting and challenging not so much the originary forces of neoliberalism as the very foundations of liberalism, i.e. the apparatus of property” (Roy, 2017, p. 6). The CAEC does this by using the current housing crisis to engage with a broader political struggle for the right to housing (Hoover, 2015). In order to do so, CAEC carries out “home liberations” to place “homeless people in peopleless homes” (Roy, 2017, p. 3). In other words, CAEC facilitates the occupation of foreclosed homes for those facing eviction. This is accomplished by going into “neighbourhoods decimated by foreclosure to catalogue and inspect homes that they know are abandoned, targeting those owned by banks or governments” (Hoover, 2015, p. 1102). They

then make the necessary repairs and facilitate the move-in process for those who have experienced an eviction.

Though these efforts serve to politicize the housing crisis, while organizing the community for the purpose of decommodifying land, they also present a unique set of challenges, such as the demanding nature of relocating families from one foreclosed home to another every year or two. This has resulted in the emergence of a new strategy to use property takeovers to pressure banks to donate land to a Community Land Trust (Roy 2017). This move towards advocating for a CLT is one of the many examples of the growth of this celebrated model to provide more local control over development and promote a more equitable distribution of land.

The remainder of this article explores the ability of CLTs to democratize land, both through the ideological and systemic barriers to gaining and maintaining community control of land and local development. It then explores strategies that have been used in an attempt to ensure these legal entities continue to be rooted in democratic control and collective ownership.

The Call for Community Control of Land

“Community control of land and housing represents a fundamentally different approach, one that puts resources (and decision-making) into the hands of local communities, encourages participatory and democratic governance, and preserves affordability and access for the long-term. It goes beyond short-term policy fixes and begins to build new democratically owned and controlled institutions that can, if developed and grown, provide the basis for a systemic solution to the systemic problem of displacement.” (Green & Hanna, 2018, p. 16)

Land and housing have long served as a source of wealth and stability. Nonetheless, “a historical legacy of displacement and exclusion, firmly rooted in racism and discriminatory public policy, has fundamentally restricted access and shaped ownership dynamics, particularly for people of color and low-income communities” (Green & Hanna, 2018, p. 3). Though policy-makers and urban planners have developed a variety of tools to provide better access to housing for low-income communities, most of these do little to address the legacy of exclusionary ownership policies. For example, inclusionary zoning may provide additional units of “affordable housing,” but in many cases the definition of affordable does not capture the true need for housing. For example, In New York City, “affordable housing” is based on the Area

Median Income (AMI) of the five boroughs as well as wealthy suburban areas outside of the city. Consequently, it does not account for the massive wealth disparities that shape the city. To illustrate this, the AMI for New York City for a 3-person family is currently \$96,100 (New York City Housing Preservation and Development, 2019), while approximately a third of residents in the neighbourhood of East New York earn less than 30% of AMI (Dervishi, 2018).

In addition to its self-defeating implementation due to the definition of affordability, inclusionary zoning does “nothing to shift the underlying dynamics of developer control in the housing sector in favor of the communities most in need and at risk” (Green & Hanna, 2018, p. 16). This argument can also be extended to the many other land use policies that fail to provide democratic control over local resources or address the inequitable ownership patterns that exclude low-income communities and people of colour from the city.

Because of the inadequacy of policy tools for addressing displacement, community control of land has been proposed as a strategy for overcoming the deeply entrenched structural inequality that has resulted from decades of discriminatory land use policies (Baicocchi et al., 2018; Green & Hanna, 2018). Through community control of land we can “begin to institutionalize democratic control of land and housing, support racially and economically inclusive ownership and access, and catalyze the deployment of public resources to support new norms of land and housing activity” (Green & Hanna, 2018, p. 5). In doing so, community control strives for community wealth building, which presents an inclusive framework for collective ownership of local assets (Baicocchi et al., 2018; Green & Hanna, 2018; Williams, 2018).

Though community control of land has the potential to restructure urban dynamics and address the legacy of exclusionary housing policies, it must be noted that community control is not inherently emancipatory or a step towards social and racial justice. In fact, local control can, and has been used historically to justify discriminatory land and housing practices (DeFilippis et al., 2018; Baicocchi et al., 2018). As Williams (2018) points out, “the uncritical celebration of localism can obscure injustices that result, so it is important to note that community control is not necessarily an absolute good” (p. 15). This is evident through the numerous examples of community control being used to perpetuate injustice. For example, community control has been used against families of colour, specifically Black families, removing them from their

neighbourhoods through harassment, violence, and the enforcement of racist deed covenants (DeFilippis et al., 2018; Baiocchi et al., 2018).

But, when collective control of land is sought by low-income communities and people of colour that have long been oppressed and excluded by the prevailing forces of exclusionary private property ownership, it can be a truly radical strategy for social and racial justice (DeFilippis et al., 2018). As a result, community control cannot exist in a vacuum. Instead it “must exist within a vision and alongside other principles that are rooted in justice and equity. Community control without racial justice and inclusivity will perpetuate racism, which remains deeply embedded in the current housing model” (Baiocchi et al., 2018, p.8).

Defining Community Control of Land

“Community control is a concept used to identify and promote efforts at collective resource ownership as a response to heightened inequality and capital mobility. The term has been used widely in political and theoretical discourses since the 1960s, but there is no clear consensus on its definition or the practical possibilities of how it can be actualized, particularly in the contemporary era of neoliberal fiscal austerity.” (Williams, 2018, p. 1)

Despite the increasingly loud calls for community control of land as a strategy for racial reparations and social justice (see Green & Hanna, 2018; Baiocchi et al., 2018), the term lacks a clear definition and concrete strategies for its implementation (Williams, 2018; DeFilippis et al., 2018). In broad terms, community control is “a concept mobilized in political as well as theoretical discourses to signal a place-based population’s decision-making power over local resources” (Williams, 2018, p. 13). The notion that community control is rooted in democratic decision-making power can be traced back to Black Power and direct democracy movements beginning in the 1960s (Williams, 2018). As a foundational component of community control, decision-making power is often considered to be the primary aim of movements involved in organizing to democratize land. In fact, in an interview with a Community Land Trust advocate, she stated that the goal of advancing democracy was central to the fight for local control: “Community control is about democracy, community control of place is an imperative... it’s about democracy, it’s about process, about who has a say, it’s not actually about what it looks like or what the land is used for” (Interview, May 7, 2019)

In addition to democratic decision-making, community control generally necessitates collective ownership. In particular, it requires collective ownership of resources that have been traditionally used to oppress low-income communities and people of colour, such as land and capital (Baiochi et al., 2018; DeFilippis et al., 2018; Angotti & Jagu, 2007). Community-owned property provides access to resources which can decrease dependence on market-driven capitalism, ultimately reducing the power-laden relationships vulnerable communities have with corporations, landlords and other deep-pocketed, powerful actors (Williams, 2018, p. 2). Because of this, the fight for community control is a direct response to neoliberalism and global capitalism, and an attempt for vulnerable populations to protect themselves from the inequitable impacts of these economic structures (DeFilippis et al., 2018).

Nonetheless, the interpretations of community control are varied, and in many cases, it remains an ideal with unclear practical applications. Though this can provide desired flexibility for social movements, it also poses significant challenges for analyzing its efficacy and in some cases advocating for its adoption and implementation (Williams, 2018). This article does not attempt to provide a concrete definition of community control. Instead, it explores CLTs as a strategy for community control, while highlighting the barriers to its implementation in a context of neoliberalism. For the purposes of this article, community control requires both democratic control of land, capital and local development, as well as the transfer of land from the speculative market to collective ownership (Angotti, 2008). The following sections will explore how Community Land Trusts can promote community control, as well as the barriers they face in doing so.

Democratizing Land Through Community Land Trusts

What do CLTs look like?

Community Land Trusts can be difficult to define because they emerge from a variety of different contexts and take many different forms. They can grow from grassroots organizing against development-driven displacement, or from non-profit organizations seeking a model to maximize their investment in affordable housing by controlling the resale values of homes. Though most CLTs focus on the provision of housing to low-income communities, they can also be home to community gardens and commercial spaces.

Despite the many forms and contexts from which CLTs are born, they all share some key characteristics. Some main approaches that underpin CLTs are the resale restrictions necessary for preserving affordable housing, and “an approach to citizen governance that privileges local communities” (Moore & McKee, 2012, p. 280). CLTs also require land to be transferred from the speculative market to a trust, which is managed by a non-profit organization with a tripartite board structure to ensure democratic participation and community control. This tripartite board consists of renters and leaseholders, elected officials or other representatives of the public interest, as well as residents in the CLTs service area who do not reside on CLT land (Davis, 2014).

Generally, CLTs are rooted in a place-based community, though they often face the pressure to expand to meet funder’s needs or reach other underserved neighbourhoods where residents are facing the threat of displacement (DeFilippis et al., 2018). Regardless of their geographic area, CLTs generally hold the title to scattered parcels of land, which are leased (typically for 99 years) to co-operatives, homeowners or other non-profits to manage the buildings. The land itself cannot be resold, and is thereby “removed permanently from the market, owned and managed on behalf of a place-based community, present and future” (Davis, 2014, p. 5).

Moreover, it is important to highlight an important distinction between CLTs and other potential forms of community control of land. As a CLT advocate in New York City pointed out,

“There’s a big difference between a community centre or community garden, social centre squatted building, and actual community control of land, which is a democratic process for deciding how place is to be used and who is going to be able to make money, by for example, charging rent” (Interview, May 7, 2019).

As a result, it is important to emphasize that Community Land Trusts are a mechanism for providing a democratic framework to collectively manage land, rather than a physical structure or development strategy with specific characteristics. Overlooking this distinction often leads to confusion and skepticism on behalf of city agencies, who frequently pose questions about CLTs’ ability to develop land, which is not in fact, their role. This can present a challenge for the CLT

movement, given the tendency to ignore the urban commons because they do not always look like property, which leads to them being overlooked and misunderstood (Blomley, 2008).

The Origins of the CLT Model

“Since the denial of property rights has been one of the key methods for reinforcing white supremacy in the United States, civil rights organizers developed a model centered around claiming power through land that also went beyond the traditionally American system of individual ownership.” (Mironova, 2019)

The roots of Community Land Trusts in the United States can be traced to the Civil Rights Movement in Southwest Georgia. In 1969, a group of Black activists created New Communities Inc., the first Community Land Trust. New Communities, Inc. was grounded in the struggle for racial justice and aimed to “give black farmers the opportunity to gain and retain control of basic resources in the face of extreme marginalization” (DeFilippis et al, 2018, p. 757).

Furthermore, the foundation of New Communities Inc. emerged from “a fertile seedbed of theoretical ideas, practical experiments, and social movements built up over the span of a hundred years” (Davis, 2014, p. 4). This fertile seedbed was sown with the critique of private property proposed by Henry George, as well as land reform movements such as the Gramdan movement in India, the English garden cities, and Mexican ejidos. It was through this rich theoretical foundation that the founders of New Communities Inc. questioned the unjust nature of private property and sought to decommodify and reclaim the use value of land over its exchange value through community control. In order to do so, they created the first CLT as “a legal entity, a quasi-public body, chartered to hold land in stewardship for all mankind present and future while protecting the legitimate use-rights of its residents” (Swann et al., 1972, p. 10).

Urban Community Land Trusts

The Community Land Cooperative in Cincinnati’s West End was the first urban Community Land Trust. Similar to New Communities Inc., it sought to prevent displacement by not only removing land from the speculative market, but also by controlling the resale price of all homes in the CLT (Davis, 2014). This was the first time that a CLT implemented a contractual

agreement to control the resale value in order to ensure permanent affordability for one of the most economically and racially marginalized communities in Cincinnati. The Community Land Cooperative of Cincinnati “served a population that had been excluded from the economic and political mainstream. It was a product of grassroots organizing and a vehicle for community empowerment: a means for controlling the fate of an impoverished inner-city neighborhood, while involving the neighborhood’s residents in the CLT’s activities and governance” (Davis, 2014, p. 32).

In the current landscape of real estate speculation, Community Land Trusts are increasingly cited as a potential strategy for mitigating displacement. CLTs are able to do this by preserving affordability and “stabilizing the speculative increase of property values when neighborhoods are gentrified” (Choi et al., 2017, p. 4). Though there is limited quantitative research to demonstrate the ability of CLTs to mitigate displacement, existing empirical studies do show that there is an inverse relationship between CLTs and gentrification (Choi et al., 2017).

Community Land Trusts as a Strategy for Stewardship

Community Land Trusts challenge an economy built on private property and the commodification of housing through a shift towards collective stewardship of land. From the communal farming of New Communities Inc. to the holistic community planning approach of some CLTs today, stewardship for collective benefit has been a foundational aspect of community-controlled land and CLTs. This tradition originated in Indigenous communities across Turtle Island (Davis, 2014), though most CLTs do not trace their roots to Indigenous stewardship practices. That being said, there are examples of Indigenous communities using the CLT model to reclaim and steward land, such as the Segorea Te Land Trust.

Through this approach to collective stewardship of land, many CLTs are able to provide wrap-around supports to low-income communities that are most affected by displacement. In particular, there is evidence to suggest that stewardship activities result in lower rates of foreclosure, which increases neighbourhood stability and helps prevent further speculation and displacement. According to a study by Thaden (2011), CLTs are on average ten times less likely to experience foreclosure, which is largely a result of stewardship activities and the fact that many CLTs are often part of an interconnected web of services and programs for local residents. For example, during 2008 and 2009, the worst years of the financial crisis in Boston,

only one property in the Dudley Neighbours Inc. Community Land Trust experienced foreclosure compared to 44 and 41 foreclosures in the neighbouring communities (Louie, 2016).

Challenges for Community Land Trusts

In the last twenty years, Community Land Trusts have become increasingly popular for their ability to maximize subsidies for affordable housing by removing land from the speculative market. Though their increasing popularity has resulted in the expansion of the CLT model across the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Kenya, among other countries, there is increasing concern about CLTs' ability to remain rooted in their initial emancipatory values, particularly their commitment to providing community control in historically marginalized neighbourhoods (Williams, 2018; DeFilippis et al., 2018; Lowe & Thaden, 2016; Davis, 2014).

The Contest for the Soul of the CLT

As a result of the recent expansion of CLTs as a celebrated mechanism for the provision of affordable housing, concerns have been raised regarding CLTs' ability to continue to serve as a mechanism for community control. This question has been described as a "contest for the soul of the CLT," resulting from the pressure to grow, the municipalization and professionalization of CLTs, as well as the neoliberal context within which they operate (Williams, 2018; DeFilippis et al., 2018; Davis, 2014). Though there is still minimal literature on the topic, some recent publications have shed light on the challenges that prevent CLTs from focusing on local and democratic control of resources (Williams, 2018; DeFilippis et al., 2018; Lowe & Thaden, 2016; Davis, 2014).

Though there is insufficient literature to demonstrate that there has in fact been a departure from the initial values of community control in CLTs, the studies that do exist on the matter illustrate that most CLTs are primarily focused on the provision of affordable housing. As DeFilippis et al. (2018) point out, there are a number of reasons to believe that a shift away from a community-oriented ideology is occurring. One of the most compelling indications can be seen in the goals identified in CLTs' mission statements. Based on a word count of CLTs' mission statements, the four most common words were affordable, housing, community, and land (DeFilippis et al, 2018). In fact,

"the total count between these was 84 uses of the term affordable, 70 uses of the term housing, 44 uses of the term land, and 43 uses of the term community (this

is when the phrase community land trust is excluded). Affordable was used almost twice as often as land, suggesting an emphasis on affordable housing programs over other functions of a community land trust. The percentage of mission statements that even include the term community is just 32%” (DeFilippis et al, 2018, p. 760).

The next section will identify how the challenges CLTs face contribute to this “contest for the soul of CLT,” and outline how they detract from the movement’s original mission to serve as a mechanism for community control and empowerment.

Land Acquisition

“For the Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house.” (Lorde, 1984)

Through my participation in the Learning Exchange and interviews with CLT advocates and organizers in New York City, one of the primary barriers identified for emerging and established CLTs was the acquisition of property. This is particularly relevant in cities that serve as centres for speculative real estate investment, such as New York City. Given the high cost of land, and the fact that many CLTs are born out of grassroots community organizing efforts with small budgets, it is not surprising that land acquisition is often the most significant challenge for CLTs. This is exacerbated by the context of neoliberal capitalism in which CLTs are operating, forcing them to compete with deep-pocketed developers. As a CLT advocate in New York City:

“Our whole system is set up to consolidate property ownership amongst large white-owned corporations. That was done on purpose in the 1950s, that wasn’t so long ago and we’re still living with that. Land was literally given to those corporations and continues to be and it’s very hard to re-engineer that distribution system” (Interview, May 7, 2019).

This inequitable distribution system relies on a legal framework developed to attract investment to the city not only during periods of abandonment, but also during periods of growth. One example of this are the tax breaks provided to developers to attract investment, such the 421-a tax exemption which was introduced in 1971 during a period of economic stagnation in New York City (Stein, 2019). Despite the fact that New York City is now one of the most attractive markets for real estate development, the 421-a tax exemption continues to “incentivize”

development, ultimately lining the pockets of developers rather than providing much needed affordable housing (Stein, 2019).

Meanwhile, a number of other mechanisms are employed not to attract investment, but instead to extract wealth from low-income communities. An example of this is the tax lien sale, which was created by mayor Giuliani in 1996 in order to capitalize on homeowners' debt. When a homeowner has unpaid property taxes, water bills or other charges, the New York City Department of Finance sells the liens to a third party collection agency. The high interest rates, which are compounded daily, can often serve to force already financially burdened homeowners into foreclosure (Interview, May 7, 2019).

These policies, and many others such as the Third Party Transfer and the privatization of public housing are merely manifestations of the complicity of the state in increasing property values and propelling racial banishment. Despite compelling proposals to eliminate tax breaks for development and transfer properties from the tax lien sale to a land bank, corporate lobbying has successfully perpetuated the status quo. This presents a particular challenge for Community Land Trusts, given that in many cases they are left with few options for land acquisition outside of the private market, which are financially inaccessible. This is exacerbated further by the dwindling stock of available public land (Interview, May 6, 2019).

CLTs and Private Property Ownership

"This is a business, this is about economic sense, I'm not drinking the Kool-Aid, you can't make me, I think you're all nuts. That you're taking the commune kind of approach to life. That's not what we're about. We're about getting people into homeownership." (Executive Director of a CLT, quoted in DeFilippis et al, 2018, p. 760)

Another challenge that the CLT model faces for advancing community control of land is the tendency to see their role as a more accessible avenue to homeownership in the private market. The quote above illustrates the tendency of some CLT staff to celebrate "aspects of the model that most closely align with mainstream values of individual property ownership" (DeFilippis et al., 2018). Unfortunately, that goal does little to address the commodification of land, ultimately perpetuating the notion that housing is primarily an avenue for asset building. In the words of a New York City CLT advocate:

“It’s way too easy for it to just turn into more accessible form of home ownership that ultimately just serves as a stepping stone to market rate housing, and that’s including more people in a speculative model without doing a lot to address underlying forces. CLTs that operate under that framework are not doing a lot to address underlying forces. Not because they’re not at a scale where they’re making a big impact, but because they’re not thinking about how to de-link housing from asset building.” (Interview, May 6, 2019)

The relationship between Community Land Trusts and collective ownership is complicated by the fact that, historically, communities of colour, and especially Black communities have been excluded from private homeownership. This presents a complex challenge, as some communities may perceive that CLTs that don’t facilitate entry into the private real estate market perpetuate the racial wealth gap by continuing to exclude communities of colour from the opportunity to accrue wealth through home equity (Interview, May 6, 2019). Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a clear strategy for overcoming this challenge. That being said, it seems unlikely that providing avenues for those who have been systematically oppressed by private homeownership will solve the problem. But, as one interviewee pointed out:

“It depends on whether you ultimately feel like capitalism needs to be overthrown or whether including more people in the system and giving more people the opportunity to be successful under capitalism is the way to go” (Interview, May 6, 2019).

Expansionist Tendencies: Growth & Professionalization of CLTs

“Organizations that depend on fitting into existing power structures often cannot challenge those structures without endangering themselves. Once movements become formalized into organizations, their ability to determine their own paths and to pursue radical and fundamental change can be circumscribed by their own self-interest.” (DeFilippis et al., 2018, p. 757)

Since CLTs operate within a context of neoliberal capitalism, they are subject to the same expansionist forces that have resulted in the capital surpluses that shape our cities. CLTs are susceptible to this in a number of different ways, from competitive funding environments to the pressure to acquire land outside of the neighbourhood they initially intended to serve. This

section outlines some of the main pressures CLTs face to conform to the expansionist, neoliberal context within which they operate.

Professionalization of CLTs

Given the political and administrative complexities of developing land, CLTs require connections to professionals such as urban planners, and developers, as well as important political actors (Williams, 2018; Swann et al., 1972). This is partially accomplished through the CLTs tripartite board structure which aims to involve well-connected political actors and professionals, while still being grounded in community needs. Though guidance from local elites and professionals may facilitate acquisition and development while garnering financial and political support, the reliance on actors who are unfamiliar with and disconnected from the lived experience of low-income residents may distance the CLT from local needs (DeFilippis et al., 2018). In addition to the pre-existing barriers to participation for low-income communities, such as the pressures of poverty leaving them with little time to invest in board meetings, it can also be intimidating for residents to voice their opinions when sitting on a board with local elites, policymakers and other professionals (Williams, 2018). As a result of this potentially disempowering board structure for CLTs, it is crucial to dedicate time and resources to meaningful and participatory resident engagement (DeFilippis et al., 2018; Thaden & Lowe, 2014). If CLTs fail to do this, they may “run the risk of becoming service organizations of the shadow state” (Williams, 2018, p. 5).

Financial & Institutional Support

“Like many alternative institutions for collective resource sharing, CLTs often face economic challenges that threaten their ability to foster intimate connections to the place-based communities they serve.” (Williams, 2018, p. 13)

Community Land Trusts require a steady stream of funding, as well as institutional support to organize the community, acquire and steward land. The expansion of neoliberalism and fiscal austerity since the global financial crisis has created a sense of scarcity, which has put pressure on CLTs to “develop housing more efficiently to attract the necessary funding to survive organizationally” (Williams, 2018, p. 2). This has led to concerns about the distancing of CLTs from their foundational principles, in particular the focus on service provision over organizing for structural change. This manifests as CLTs being primarily “perceived and promoted as a tool to

provide affordable housing, rather than an organizational approach that empowers disadvantaged people to take control of land” (Williams, 2018, p. 2). Furthermore, the need for CLTs to ensure organizational sustainability often results in “professionalization, growth, and appeals to funders, objectives that all manifest in tension with goals of community control” (Williams, 2018, p. 4). Meanwhile, reliance on government funding can serve to prevent CLTs from critiquing policy and fighting for structural change through community organizing (DeFilippis, 2003).

Moreover, the pressure to acquire land forces CLTs to navigate complex bureaucratic systems, necessitating both institutional support as well as professionals that are familiar with the process of land acquisition and development. In New York City, this manifests through onerous public land acquisition processes and restrictions imposed by Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). In order to acquire HPD-owned land, a CLT needs to have a proven track record of development. Although this is a reasonable request, no support is provided to match CLTs with experienced developers. This challenge is not unique to New York City. As Williams (2018) points out, the Rondo CLT in St Paul, Minnesota attributes their success to their status as a well-established CLT, since “a younger, less-developed CLT would have more difficulty gaining the necessary support for such a development” (p. 15).

Given the fact that CLTs operate within the confines of conventional land acquisition and development, they require a fairly high level of institutional support. Unfortunately, most city agencies are still unfamiliar with the CLT model and may be skeptical about facilitating their development. In the case of New York City, the focus on new development over preservation on behalf of city agencies also presents a significant barrier. As a CLT advocate pointed out, “city agencies have been given a mandate that makes it hard for them to care because they care about production, they don’t care about preservation because they were told not” (Interview, May 7, 2019).

The need for institutional support also results in a balancing act between politicizing community control of land and expanding or partnering with government agencies. According to Lowe & Thaden (2016),

“Acting in partnership with the government was perceived as the best way to advance their stewardship objectives; however, resident engagement was

predominantly focused on resident betterment rather than explicitly politicizing community control of land. Ultimately, the results indicated that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach for developing effective engagement and a thriving CLT. Respondents specified the challenge to be finding the “right balance” between pushing for practical and meaningful change within their local political environment while not overly compromising the CLT’s objectives or its likelihood for sustainability and growth” (p. 624).

The Pressure for Geographic Expansion

Despite the fact that CLTs are “continually promoted as vehicles for local empowerment, the vast majority of CLTs have grown to a scale far beyond the neighborhood level” (DeFilippis et al, 2018, p. 761). The growth of CLTs beyond the neighbourhood level results from pressure to expand by acquiring more land in order to access more funding (Williams, 2018; Krinsky & Hovde, 1996). This pressure manifests through demands from funders to expand the services of the CLT to a broader population, without providing additional funding to hire local organizers. This can also be seen in the preference to provide funding to one large CLT, rather than smaller local CLTs, as well as the pressure some local CLTs may face to merge as one entity in order to streamline costs (DeFilippis et al., 2018). This has led a number of CLTs to expand beyond the local neighbourhood, which can limit the ability of the CLT to serve and represent their community. This poses a challenge for maintaining their connection to the community while ensuring local control (DeFilippis et al., 2018). This is particularly relevant given that “tighter budgets and strained organizational capacity can lead to a narrowing of CLTs’ missions, particularly because participatory involvement of low-income people can take extra time and resources” (Williams, 2018, p. 6).

Community Organizing

In order to serve as a mechanism for community control and as an instrument for true democratic participation, CLTs need to be rooted in the needs of an organized community. Unfortunately, the lack of funding dedicated to community organizing for CLT development poses a significant challenge, and often places excessive strain on the few existing organizers that CLTs are able to hire. This can lead to burn out, especially given that often community organizers working with CLTs are deeply connected to other neighborhood struggles, and may

be simultaneously providing support to their community through childcare, employment services, etc. Given the lack of financial support for organizing, the few community members who are hired into those roles are overburdened with a multitude of responsibilities, often forcing them out of their comfort zone. When asked what some of the greatest challenges were in their work, one community organizer responded by saying:

“Keeping my sanity, and like managing my time, because I have all these added responsibilities now. You know, I’m facilitating meetings now, which I never really did before... I’m even planning meetings now... But I think the most difficult thing is understanding the real estate jargon... Keeping up on the meetings and the phone calls, trying to understand what they’re really trying to say, because I don’t really know anything about real estate. But, I understand homelessness, cause I was once homeless” (Interview, May 2, 2019).

Meanwhile, the bureaucratic processes necessary for getting CLTs off the ground poses significant barriers to community organizing. For example, given that in their inception, CLTs do not have existing tenants or even properties, community organizers may struggle to organize local residents around existing and future needs. In addition, the lengthy acquisition process can serve as a significant barrier to community organizing as most residents are facing the pressure of their short-term needs and do not have the capacity to organize around a model that may feel more like a utopian future than a realistic option for affordable housing. As a result, it is important to develop community organizing strategies to consolidate the efforts between those doing more long-term anti-displacement work, and those in need of an adequate place to live in the short to medium-term (Interview, May 6, 2019).

Successes & Opportunities in the “Contest for the Soul of the CLT”

Despite the challenges of operating within a neoliberal capitalist urban economy, there are a number of ways that Community Land Trusts have been able to remain rooted in collective ownership and democratic control. This section presents some contexts and strategies that have promoted collective control over private homeownership, including community planning, regional coordination and multi-sectoral organizing.

Community Planning & CLTs: From New York City to Puerto Rico

Cooper Square

Some of the most celebrated Community Land Trusts were born out of sustained community planning processes, which were often the result of resident organizing against development-driven displacement. For example, in the real estate and finance capital of New York City, the Cooper Square Committee emerged from organizing against attempts to bulldoze the Lower East Side through city-sponsored urban renewal. Through this process, a group of activists led by Frances Goldin and supported by urban planner Walter Thabit, created the first community plan in New York City. The Alternate Plan for Cooper Square was completed in 1961 and nine years later it became New York City's first official community plan (Angotti, 2008). Due to the lack of funding for the development of low-income housing resulting from the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, it wasn't until 1991 that the Cooper Square Committee was able to form a Community Land Trust.

The origins of the Cooper Square Committee were not simply in the acquisition of city-owned properties. In fact, at its core, both the Cooper Square Committee and CLT were "led by community organizers and tenant advocates who were committed to stopping displacement and preserving existing housing, and they became housing developers only to confront the practical problems they faced when their members found themselves taking more and more responsibility for their buildings" (Angotti, 2008, p. 6).

As a result, unlike most CLTs in the United States, the Cooper Square CLT is home to primarily rental units through its partnership with a Mutual Housing Association (MHA). Together they steward and manage 21 buildings with 380 units of low and extremely-low income housing, along with over 20 affordable commercial units which help subsidize their extremely-low income affordable housing. The MHA manages the housing, while the CLT stewards the land while providing oversight to the MHA, ensuring that they do not fall into financial distress. Meanwhile, the Cooper Square Committee, in collaboration with the Community Land Trust, continues to play an important role in community organizing and tenant engagement, while attempting to acquire additional properties to incorporate into the CLT.

The Cooper Square Committee, Community Land Trust and Mutual Housing Association are a testament to the need for sustained organizing and protest, especially in the face of

development-driven displacement. Similar to other CLTs and community planning efforts, such as the celebrated Dudley Street Neighbours Inc., and the more recent Baltimore Housing Roundtable, Cooper Square serves as a success story of community control that is not only rooted in housing, but also multi-sectoral organizing (Engelsman et al., 2016).

El Caño Martín Peña CLT

“As one of the biggest landowners in San Juan, collective land ownership has given residents of the Caño CLT the political power to confront the state and control the development of their area and the protection of the channel, within a context of profound neoliberal globalization and colonialism. They are producing an urban environment that is in line with their worldviews and departs from market-led development while favoring socioecological preservation. In today’s context of climate change and growing inequality, this is exemplary.” (Algoed & Hernández Torrales, 2019, p. 45)

Another excellent example of the need for CLTs to be rooted in anti-displacement organizing and community control is the Caño Martín Peña Community Land Trust in Puerto Rico. Though the context from which this CLT emerged is very different from Cooper Square, it was also rooted in the need for community control and resulted from a comprehensive community planning process.

The Caño Martín Peña CLT emerged from the need to “regularize land land tenure and protect the historically marginalized barrios against the threat of displacement, as an unintended consequence of the ecological restoration of the channel” (Algoed & Hernández Torrales, 2019, p. 29). This formerly polluted channel (*caño*) was home to several informal settlements, all of which had tenuous claim to the land on which they lived. Despite demands for individual land titles in informal settlements across the Global South, when these settlements are in desirable locations, individual land titles can actually accelerate displacement by exposing residents to the whims of a hostile and speculative real estate market (Algoed & Hernández Torrales, 2019).

Unlike most Community Land Trusts rooted in community control, the Caño Martín Peña CLT was the result of a participatory planning process led by a government agency, the Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority. This was done by fostering community leadership through a comprehensive planning process that went beyond simply dredging the polluted

channel. This process resulted in a Comprehensive Development and Land Use Plan for the Caño Martín Peña Special Planning District, which “contains strategies to tackle the conditions of marginalization and integrate the communities with the rest of the city,” provide infrastructure without relocating residents, and ensure that investment in the community benefits residents and local neighbourhood development (Algoed & Hernández Torrales, 2019, p. 33).

The Caño Martín Peña CLT became a particularly effective form of collective land tenure in the aftermath of Hurricane María. Due to the extent of informality in Puerto Rico, and the strict requirements for repair grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), those most affected by the natural disaster were unable to access funds due to their inability to provide proof of property ownership. In fact, initially 60% of applicants were deemed ineligible. Thanks to the CLT, the Caño communities were not only able to remain in their homes during the restoration of the channel, but they were also able to access FEMA repair loans (Algoed & Hernández Torrales, 2019).

Multi-Sectoral Organizing: Baltimore Housing Roundtable

Community Land Trusts are also more likely to be rooted in collective control and democratic decision-making if they are part of a broader fight for not only housing justice, but also social justice. In the wake of the unjust murder of Freddie Gray, the Baltimore Housing Roundtable (BHR) formed in order to propose a unified movement to coordinate and integrate the efforts of member organizations, which range from the Charm City Land Trust to Healthcare for the Homeless.⁵ Based on the understanding that the limited resources available to non-profit organizations result in counterproductive competition, the Baltimore Housing Roundtable strives to “pool resources and advocate to implement an agenda of systemic change and realize our shared values and vision” (Baltimore Housing Roundtable, 2019).

The Baltimore Housing Roundtable is firmly rooted in building a new model for housing and community development that provides local control over land. In BHR’s proposals for more equitable development, Community Land Trusts play a role in both providing local control as well as removing land from the speculative real estate market. That being said, the vision extends far beyond CLTs, and through their 20/20 campaign, they call for Fair Development in

⁵ Healthcare for the Homeless provides comprehensive health care and supportive services to those experiencing homelessness.

Baltimore through community control, as well as jobs and long-term solutions to violence (Baltimore Housing Roundtable, 2019). More specifically,

“The 20/20 campaign calls for real, annual investment in neighborhood-driven development- development that puts us in charge of our own communities & doesn't price us out. We call on Mayor Pugh to designate \$20 million in the capital budget for permanently affordable housing and \$20 million for projects that employ community residents to deconstruct vacancy and create public green space” (Baltimore Housing Roundtable, 2019).

In the case of Baltimore and other cities that have experienced significant and persistent disinvestment, the lack of existing government programs can actually serve to facilitate the adoption of comprehensive plans. As a CLT advocate in New York City pointed out, it can be much more challenging to present a comprehensive city-wide plan when a patchwork of existing blueprints and infrastructure for housing and community development already exists (Interview, May 6, 2019). That being said, as the following section points out, there are also other effective approaches to facilitate the development of Community Land Trusts as mechanisms for community control that are more suitable to complex urban areas such as New York City.

Regional Coordination: NYCCLI & The Learning Exchange

Another strategy for supporting Community Land Trust's ability to foster collective stewardship of land and control over investment and development is through regional coordination. In areas where there are several emerging and/or established CLTs, a “central server” to support capacity development can provide an “administrative apparatus that allows many community-based CLT efforts to achieve efficiencies of scale while retaining their grounding in their own communities” (Louie, 2016, p. 25). Some examples of this include the Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network, and the New York City Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI), both of which advocate for policy and funding to support the creation, expansion and stewardship efforts of local CLTs and community-controlled development (Louie, 2016).

This section specifically explores the work of NYCCLI, and its ability to serve as a central server to support capacity development by providing technical assistance, popular education materials and advocating for policy change and funding. The New York City Community Land Initiative defines itself as “an alliance of social justice and affordable housing organizations committed to

winning housing for all New Yorkers” (New York City Community Land Initiative, 2019). In essence, NYCCLI focuses on using Community Land Trusts as a tool to address the root causes of displacement and homelessness. This work has been carried out through a variety of approaches, including the incubation of the East Harlem-El Barrio Community Land Trust as a pilot project to demonstrate how CLTs can serve to mitigate displacement in low-income neighbourhoods of colour. More recently, NYCCLI has worked to coordinate a Learning Exchange for emerging and expanding Community Land Trusts in New York City. Over the course of two years, the Learning Exchange served as a peer-learning initiative with monthly workshops on various aspects of establishing a CLT, community organizing, partnerships, stewardship, development and financing, among other topics. Through these sessions, CLTs emerging from a variety of different contexts were able to learn from one another, with local experts and scholars coordinating guest speakers, and facilitating discussions between CLTs across New York City.

Over the course of the two years of the Learning Exchange, CLTs were able to engage in peer-learning while building relationships in order to build momentum for a city-wide CLT movement. This resulted not only in progress for each individual CLT, but also served to provide knowledge and expertise to organizers and staff working towards CLT incorporation, property development or land acquisition. For example, some members adapted the resources and knowledge from the Learning Exchange to their own context. In the Bronx, this resulted in a series of CLT 101 sessions based on NYCCLI materials. These sessions were adapted to the local context of the Bronx and facilitated by local community organizers. Another community organizer in Brooklyn became increasingly passionate about the CLT model through increased exposure at the Learning Exchange and created a CLT dictionary in order to provide local residents and other community organizers with a resource to demystify the jargon of land and housing development.

Another key component of the Learning Exchange was its emphasis on the importance of sustained community organizing. Because of the variety of contexts from which CLTs in New York City emerge, some members of the Learning Exchange approached the model from the perspective of non-profit housing developers and Community Development Corporations.⁶ As a result, some participants viewed CLTs as primarily as a model for affordable housing, and in

⁶ Though Community Development Corporations were rooted in organizing, many of them have seen a departure from their origins and now serve as non-profit organizations focused on the provision of housing and local programming without necessarily being steeped in a culture of community organizing.

some cases even as a stepping stone to private homeownership. Despite this, over the course of the Learning Exchange, I witnessed how these members began to understand the need for CLTs to be rooted in community organizing and empowerment.

In addition to facilitating peer learning and providing support through popular education materials and technical assistance, the central server model of regional CLT coordination can also foster coalition and movement building. In the case of NYCCLI, this served to build momentum to secure municipal discretionary funding to provide much needed support to emerging and expanding CLTs across the city (Spivack, 2019). This funding will be dedicated to community organizing, rather than property acquisition or development, which will ultimately serve to further ground CLTs in the neighbourhoods which they seek to serve.

Conclusion

Community control of land has been proposed as a strategy to overcome the widespread inequities caused by a legacy of racial discrimination and an urban landscape shaped by global capital. This article presents a case for community control, while highlighting some of the main barriers that grassroots movements face in acquiring and stewarding land through the increasingly celebrated Community Land Trust model. It highlights the challenges of operating within a context of neoliberal capitalism, which includes the acquisition of land and funding, as well as the pressure expand geographically. In many cases, these challenges have served to distance CLTs from their roots in emancipatory community control, reducing them to mechanisms for the provision of affordable housing and in some instances, even as tools to access private property ownership. This departure from the initial goal of Community Land Trusts is sometimes referred to as the “contest for the soul of the CLT” (Davis, 2014).

In an attempt to provide strategies for CLTs to remain rooted in community control and democratic decision-making, this article highlights three possible approaches that have been utilized across the United States, including comprehensive community planning, multi-sectoral organizing, and regional coordination. By implementing these strategies, Community Land Trusts are better able to remain rooted in not only community control, but also in an anti-displacement framework based on racial and social justice.

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Regional Coordination for Community Land Trusts: The Case of New York City

Introduction

There is a growing interest in the Community Land Trust (CLT) model across New York City, with a diversity of organizations and communities getting together to demand community control of land through collective ownership and democratic decision-making. Although there is currently only one established CLT in New York City - Cooper Square -, there are over a dozen emerging across the city. From Brooklyn to the Bronx, these initiatives have grown from grassroots community groups fighting rezonings to Community Development Corporations (CDCs)⁷ seeking to incorporate the CLT model into their existing portfolio. Not only do CLTs in New York City originate from many different contexts, but their missions are also varied, ranging from providing accessible community gardens to developing housing on vacant city-owned property.

Though there is currently minimal financial and legislative infrastructure to support the emergence of CLTs in New York City, in 2017 Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) released a Request for Expressions of Interest for organizations to submit proposals outlining strategies and approaches for developing and stewarding land using the CLT model. Following this, the de Blasio administration and Enterprise Community Partners provided a \$1.65 million grant to support CLTs. Some of this funding was designated to launching a two-year Learning Exchange from June 2017 to 2019, which provided support to CLTs through technical assistance and capacity development through a peer learning environment. The Learning Exchange was coordinated by the New York City Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI), which supports Community Land Trusts as a strategy for preserving the right to housing for low-income people.

This report outlines the results of a community needs assessment that was conducted with 8 emerging and expanding Community Land Trusts in New York City. The goal of the needs assessment was to determine current organizational capacity, strengths, weaknesses and next

⁷ Community Development Corporations are community-based organizations working towards equitable revitalization initiatives across the United States. They often manage affordable housing and provide community programming for local residents.

steps for CLTs involved in the Learning Exchange. It was also intended to help determine what CLT functions could be consolidated through city-wide coordination. The results of this research can also serve to provide insight into strategies for capacity development, while guiding the work of emerging CLT coalitions outside of New York City.

Methods & Research Process

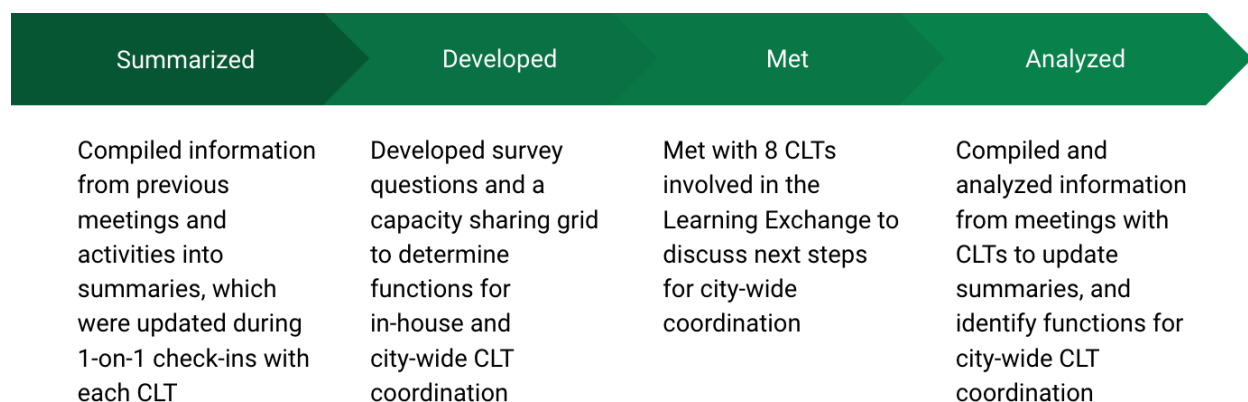


Figure 1 - Research Process

The main research priority was to conduct a needs assessment to better understand the current organizational capacity, strengths and weaknesses of established and emerging CLTs in New York City. Broadly, the goal was to determine how NYCCLI could continue to support CLT development beyond the culmination of their monthly Learning Exchange sessions in June 2019. More specifically, the aim of this research was to determine which organizational needs can be consolidated through NYCCLI and which functions are specific to each CLT.

In preparation for our interviews, we compiled relevant background information from previous meetings with CLT organizers. We then adapted existing NYCCLI resources to build the needs assessment, which involved developing research questions and a capacity sharing grid (see Appendix). The questions served to determine each CLTs progress since August 2018, as well as any changes in their organizational status and needs, including staff and legal support. The questions set the stage for the capacity sharing activity, which assessed each CLTs current strengths', while envisioning the future of city-wide CLT coordination. Both the questions and capacity sharing grid were then reviewed by NYCCLI board members.

The needs assessment was completed by seven emerging CLTs and one established CLT involved in the Learning Exchange. The capacity sharing grid was consolidated, and the answers to the questions were summarized and analyzed in order to identify and highlight collective strengths, technical assistance and popular education needs, as well as the next steps for city-wide coordination.

Findings

Collective Strengths

Thanks to the diversity of contexts and goals that guide Community Land Trusts across New York City, they have a wide range of collective experience with community organizing, building partnerships, as well as with housing development, community planning and land stewardship.

In addition to extensive knowledge and a history of community organizing in neighbourhoods across New York City, CLTs also have a great deal of collective experience with leadership development, as well as homeowner and tenant organizing and engagement. In addition, given the diverse communities in which some CLTs are organizing, they also have significant experience working in multicultural and multigenerational contexts and providing multilingual facilitation in Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean and Spanish. Furthermore, some CLTs also have experience with collective impact approaches to mobilizing residents and partners for community planning, particularly to fight unjust rezonings and land use actions.

In terms of relationship building and partnerships, Community Land Trusts in New York City also have extensive experience building cross-sector relationships to foster capacity, consensus, and share best practices. In particular, some CLTs in New York City have been able to develop a multi-issue analysis with CLTs as a point of collaboration across coalitions for economic democracy, youth organizing, and tenant associations. Finally, several CLTs have been able to successfully garner support and collaborate with elected officials.

In addition to their experience with community organizing and building partnerships, many CLTs also have knowledge of affordable housing financing, lending, as well as both city and private subsidy programs. Though most emerging CLTs do not have experience developing housing, several of them have been able to successfully win RFPs for vacant city-owned properties and

have considerable experience with architecture and urban design. Furthermore, many CLTs have experience with community planning, particularly mapping, visioning and strategic planning. Some CLTs, such as Cooper Square, and those that are emerging from Community Development Corporations, also have valuable experience managing properties and pairing limited-equity cooperatives with CLTs. Finally, some grassroots organizations that are approaching CLTs through a holistic lens have experience combining green space and community gardens with affordable housing.

Challenges and Barriers to CLT Development in NYC

Despite this extensive list of collective strengths, Community Land Trusts in New York City face a variety of challenges, some of which are common to all CLTs, and others which are specific to each individual context. The two primary barriers that CLTs face are in acquiring land and funding. Though the specific challenges for land acquisition vary depending on each CLTs local context, the lack of awareness and institutional support for the CLT model poses a significant barrier. Given that many CLTs are born from grassroots struggles against development, and often lack formal experience developing land, they are at a significant disadvantage for winning Requests for Proposals released by city agencies, such as Housing Preservation and Development. Furthermore, the lengthy acquisition process for city-owned land is a significant limiting factor for smaller emerging CLTs with limited capacity, who are often unable to compete with developers who are also bidding for these city-owned properties. Meanwhile, the dwindling stock of city-owned vacant lots also forces CLTs to compete with developers for privately-owned vacant lots, often leaving CLTs with the difficult to manage scatter sites.

Beyond the severe lack of funding for CLTs and barriers to land acquisition, some of the primary high-level legislative and institutional challenges result from the city's complex bureaucratic and legal structures. For example, a significant barrier to CLT development is the result of the city-wide housing lottery and marketing requirement for all affordable housing in New York City. Due to the long history of housing discrimination in the United States, the Fair Housing Act stipulates that all units of affordable housing need to be allocated through a city-wide lottery system in order to mitigate discrimination. Unfortunately, in the case of CLTs, this poses a significant barrier to housing residents in neighbourhoods that are threatened by gentrification, as it essentially restricts local residents' ability to move into new units of affordable housing in their neighbourhood. Meanwhile, as a consequence of Local Law 64 which was passed earlier this

year, new affordable housing units must be advertised on a city-wide housing portal. The combination of these policies presents a significant administrative and capacity burden to CLTs and small non-profit organizations, and are ultimately in conflict with their mission to serve the local community. Another important policy issue that limits CLTs ability to grow are transfer tax assessments based on ground lease fees indexed to inflation, which can lead to a disproportionately high tax burden for CLTs. These policy issues, along with many others, such as advocacy around property pipelines for CLTs and awarding additional RFP points for CLT projects, would benefit from coordinated advocacy between CLTs and other small non-profit organizations involved in the provision of affordable housing in New York City.

Technical Assistance Needs

In order to overcome some of these institutional barriers, the following technical assistance needs were identified in the needs assessments. Given that a significant barrier to CLT development is land acquisition, most groups stated that they would benefit from clarification of legal frameworks for CLT land acquisition at both the city and state levels. Multiple CLTs specifically requested support to develop a better understanding of the acquisition process for acquiring vacant HPD-owned lots. Meanwhile, one CLT identified their need for guidelines and technical assistance to acquire land from the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. This group also indicated that a better understanding of the process for pairing community gardens with CLTs would also be helpful.

In terms of supporting the process of creating a CLT, several groups also expressed an interest in technical assistance to clarify the legal, financial and governance management structures of CLTs in order to ensure equitable leadership, accountability to the neighborhood base and long-term organizational sustainability. In addition, guidelines to inform the incorporation process for CLTs, as well as strategies and best practices for evaluating partnership opportunities, feasibility, and costs and benefits were also identified as an area of interest for technical assistance. Finally, most CLTs identified a need for ongoing legal support as questions emerge in terms of organizing, acquisition, development and stewardship.

Popular Education Needs

In order to support community ownership and participatory democracy through CLTs, local residents need to not only be informed about land stewardship, but actively engaged in CLT

decision-making processes. Because of this, NYCCLI has developed a variety of popular education tools ranging from workshops to board games, making information about CLTs accessible to a variety of different audiences. During our meetings with Community Land Trusts, we identified that there is a need for popular education tools and workshops on tenant rights, housing law and policy, property acquisition opportunities, and neighborhood housing stock.

Given New York City's local context, some groups also expressed a need for case studies and workshop materials that highlight CLTs working in gentrifying and hot-market contexts that are focused on community organizing, racial justice, and deep affordability. There was also a need for multilingual curricula, as well as workshop materials and facilitation that can be customized to local neighborhood contexts, needs, and concerns. One group also highlighted a desire for broad popular education material related to real estate and power.

Due to the relative complexity and lack of familiarity around the CLT model, some groups we spoke with also highlighted the need for more simplified materials about how CLTs work. Two specific examples included a short video outlining what a CLT is and how it operates, as well as a simplified (or abbreviated) version of NYCCLI's existing comic.⁸

City-Wide Coordination

As was highlighted in the second article in this portfolio, regional, or city-wide coordination and coalition building can serve as a strategy to help ground CLTs in democratic participation and collective control of land. This can be accomplished through the creation of a central server, which ultimately allows CLTs to remain rooted in their own communities while engaging in broader advocacy and coalition building. Meanwhile, as one CLT organizer pointed out, "learning about democratic governance seems best approached in collective environments" (Interview, May 14, 2019).

Furthermore, regional coordination through a central server can also serve to provide much-needed administrative and financial support to emerging and expanding CLTs. For example, given that there are several CLTs that are either attempting to or in the process of acquiring city-owned properties, it would be helpful to have a regional coordinating entity to navigate city bureaucracy and advocate for CLTs with different agencies as well as City Council. In addition,

⁸ NYCCLI's comic can be found online at:
https://nyccli.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/fightingtosaveourcommunities_web.pdf

the central server could support local acquisition campaigns through shared resources and advocacy, while facilitating access to technical and legal support. Finally, given the competitive funding environment, it is helpful to have a single unified entity monitoring and coordinating city-wide funding opportunities in order to promote equitable distribution of funding while avoiding competition between different CLTs.

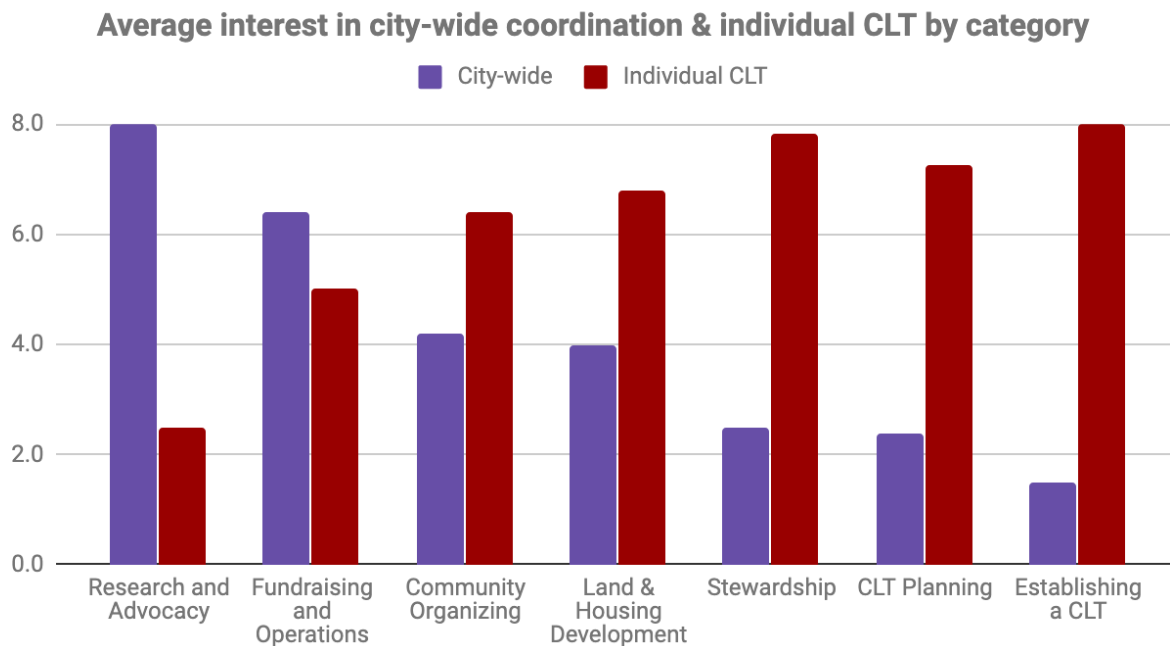


Figure 2 - Average interest in city-wide coordination by category

Because of the important role that a regional coordinating body can play to support local CLTs, one of the primary goals of the interviews and needs assessments was to determine what functions can be coordinated at a city-wide level. Using the capacity sharing grid (see Appendix), we were able to identify that city-wide coordination should prioritize research and advocacy, fundraising and operations, as well as certain functions within community organizing and land and housing development. These categories were also among the lowest priorities for individual in-house CLTs, which focused on functions related to establishing a CLT, CLT planning, and stewardship.

Significant Interest in City-wide Coordination



Figure 3 - Interest in city-wide coordination

In terms of city-wide coordination, there were specific functions which received unanimous support. In particular, all CLTs felt that research and advocacy should be coordinated at a city-wide level, with priorities informed by individual CLTs. This includes raising awareness and understanding of CLTs among public stakeholders, as well as developing policy platforms and legislative campaigns to advance CLTs. Another area that received almost unanimous support for city-wide coordination was fundraising and operations, specifically for legal support and contract management for CLT capacity building. In terms of community organizing, most groups felt that they would benefit from a city-wide entity to identify and engage with ally organizations, educate and train community organizers on CLTs, and develop organizing campaigns to move CLTs forward. Finally, several groups highlighted a desire for city-wide collaboration to build the CLT's land and housing development capacity in order for each individual CLT to be able to manage development in-house and through partnerships.

Minimal Interest in City-Wide Coordination

There were also several areas where there was low or no interest in city-wide coordination. These were in the categories of establishing a CLT, stewardship, CLT planning, and certain aspects of community organizing. In general, groups felt that a city-wide entity could provide some best practices for incorporation processes, establishing a board of directors, and determining the mission of the CLT, but that ultimately these functions should be driven and executed in-house. Furthermore, CLT organizers and staff indicated that functions involving

community engagement, member recruitment and leadership development should not be coordinated at a city-wide level. Similarly, they emphasized that acquiring and developing target properties and potential sources of funding for development should not priorities for city-wide coordination and should be carried out by individual CLTs, with support and technical assistance from a city-wide entity.



Figure 4 - Minimal interest in city-wide coordination

Recommendations

A series of recommendations can be made based on the results of this research. Most of these recommendations apply specifically to the work of NYCCLI and CLTs in New York City, but could also be applied to other geographic contexts.

Based on the needs assessments, the main recommendation is to form a community organizing working group or committee. This would provide CLT organizers with a collaborative environment to share best practices and strategies to mobilize their communities. Furthermore, it would allow new CLT organizers to learn from more seasoned organizers working in a variety of different contexts across the city. Meanwhile, the community organizing working group could serve to inform policy priorities for NYCCLI, while building momentum for the CLT movement in New York City. In order to provide broader context and learning opportunities for CLT organizers, staff and members could also benefit from regional site visits to the Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative in Boston, or to the Champlain Housing Trust in Northwestern Vermont.

In addition to the popular education and technical assistance needs identified in previous sections, it would also be beneficial to provide resources to the wider public as well as broader CLT membership through community-based workshops. Given that the Learning Exchange took place as a monthly all-day workshop, it was not particularly accessible to members that were not actively employed by one of the participating CLTs. As a result, providing more accessible opportunities to engage members in city-wide CLT coalition building would broaden the scope and reach of the movement. In particular, one CLT organizer identified a need for community-based workshops to provide members with training on design so that they are better equipped to engage in community planning processes. Additionally, workshops on city-wide or borough-based planning processes and policies through participatory design workshops would provide a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities for local CLT development.

The final recommendation for city-wide coordination is to secure financial support for sustained community organizing for all emerging and expanding CLTs in New York City. Though this is quite a feat, a recent announcement of \$850,000 of discretionary funding from the city is evidence that the movement is gaining ground. It is crucial to maintain this momentum by ensuring that CLTs have access to the necessary funds to operate and garner community support.

Conclusion

Regional CLT coordination provides a variety of opportunities for addressing some of the ideological and practical barriers that CLTs face in New York City. This report summarizes some of the primary ways in which city-wide collaboration can address the institutional, administrative, and legislative challenges that CLTs face, and how the New York City Community Land Initiative can play the role of a central server by supporting capacity development, coordinating advocacy and funding, while providing better access to technical assistance and popular education materials. In doing so, the central server can reduce the administrative and bureaucratic burden CLTs face, allowing them to remain grounded in their community when faced with the reality of scarce resources and the pressure to expand their scope. Meanwhile, NYCCLI provides a model for peer learning to incubate and support new and expanding CLTs.

Concluding Remarks

This portfolio explores neighbourhood change and displacement from several different scales, beginning with the implications of individual choice to strategies for community organizing to resist the exclusionary forces of the speculative real estate market. In doing so, it explores how gaining and maintaining collective control over land and local development through Community Land Trusts can serve to address displacement. Additionally, it identifies some of these challenges CLTs face in a context of neoliberal capitalism, as well as the strategies that can be used to resist the tendency for CLTs to become a stepping stone towards private homeownership. The final component of the portfolio delves into the intricacies of regional coordination for CLTs through the results of a Community-Based Participatory Research process with the New York City Community Land Initiative.

While this portfolio adopts a multi-scalar and approach to research on neighbourhood change, community organizing and displacement, its scope is limited both from a geographic and theoretical perspective. It is geographically limited in that it focuses primarily on New York City, and does not account for the many ways in which movements in the Global South have contributed and continue to contribute to the fight for collectively owned land through both traditional and contemporary forms of community control. Furthermore, it does not address important aspects of community control, namely the potential to use Indigenous notions of stewardship to decolonize our relationship to land. These are both areas that future studies could and should explore to contribute to both theoretical and pragmatic discourse on community control of land.

Finally, I urge students, researchers, community organizers and planners exploring any aspect of urban restructuring or community control to take a moment to adopt a self-reflexive approach to their work by analyzing their relationship to land as well as their role in the processes of neighbourhood change. I believe that this can lead to not only enriching dialogue, but also action. In acknowledging our complicity in displacement and racial banishment, we are better equipped to address the inequitable status quo that results from a housing market driven by speculative investment rather than the increasingly dire need for a place to call home for vulnerable groups that have historically been denied access to adequate housing.

Appendix

Establishing a CLT

	City-wide	Borough-wide	Individual CLT	Notes
Determine relationship of the CLT to founding organization(s)				
Determine approach to development on CLT land				
Determine CLT mission and governance structure/by-laws				
Identify/recruit/train founding board members				
Plan for board expansion/transitions				
Incorporate the CLT				

Community Organizing

	City-wide	Borough-wide	Individual CLT	Notes
Hire community organizer(s) to develop CLT membership/organize around CLTs				
Educate/train organizer(s) on CLT				
Establish goals, principles, and procedures for CLT organizing				
Conduct outreach to build community support/recruit members for the CLT				
Identify and develop member leaders for CLT organizing				
Form/engage with Tenant Associations in target buildings				

Identify/engage ally organizations				
Conduct community-based political education on CLTs				
Develop organizing campaigns to move CLT(s) forward				
Participate in Coalition Organizing to build power for CLTs citywide				

CLT Planning

	City-wide	Borough-wide	Individual CLT	Notes
Establish goals, principles, and procedures for CLT planning				
Conduct neighborhood survey/needs assessment				
Identify/engage with key community assets and resources				
Identify/research target properties for the CLT				
Create plans for acquiring and developing target properties				
Conduct participatory planning and design workshops with CLT members				

Engage with elected officials/the “official” planning landscape to secure needed approvals				
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Land and Housing Development

	City-wide	Borough-wide	Individual CLT	Notes
Establish goals, principles, and procedures for CLT development				
Build the CLT's capacity to engage in development or partner with devel				
Identify development partners/Form development partnerships				
Conduct building inspections and environmental assessments of target properties				
Involve CLT members in development process				
Work to acquire target properties				

Identify/assemble subsidies and financing for capital development and operations				
Work with architect(s) on development plans				
Establish plans for day-to-day management of CLT properties				

Stewardship

	City-wide	Borough-wide	Individual CLT	Notes
Practice democratic governance of CLT properties and other resources				
Ensure/oversee management of CLT properties and other resources				
Identify/secure funding and other forms of support for CLT sustainability and expansion				
Facilitate CLT/community engagement on a regular basis				
Portfolio & asset management				

Research & Advocacy

	City-wide	Borough-wide	Individual CLT	Notes
Raise awareness and understanding of CLTs among the public stakeholders, including elected officials, public agencies, funders, and advocates				
Conduct research (e.g. interviews, case studies, participatory action) to identify benefits of CLTs and support advocacy and popular education efforts				
Develop policy platform and legislative campaigns to advance CLTs				
Strategic communications work to highlight progress and build momentum around CLTs				

Fundraising & Operations

	City-wide	Borough-wide	Individual CLT	Notes
Fundraising & contract management for CLT capacity-building and coordination				
Fundraising & contract management for CLT operations & staffing				
Bookkeeping & Accounting				
Human Resources support for CLT staff				
Legal Support				